

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism



INTERNATIONALISM

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Fightback's Points of
Unity

Editorial

The basis of true, liberatory anticapitalist politics is internationalism. *Fightback* has been at pains in recent years to distinguish this from “campism” – siding against one’s own imperialist rulers, but supporting the rulers of a different imperialist bloc. This leads, at best, to the moral bankruptcy whereby you have to know whether a bombed-out hospital is the doing of the United States or of Russia before you know whether to condemn it. If the Left cares about communicating outside its own “bubble”, we can’t simultaneously condemn Israel’s victim-blaming excuses for atrocities in Palestine, while using exactly the same excuses for Russian atrocities in Ukraine – or vice versa.

At worst, campism leads to active collaboration with reactionary or even fascist forces. The Russian state (and to a lesser extent the Chinese one) uses reactionary, racist and homophobic rhetoric to rally its own people – and its foreign supporters – against US-led globalised neoliberalism. As Byron Clark notes in this issue (and has noted before), the “Remove Kebab” rhetoric of genocidal Serbian nationalism is not only echoed by the fascist mass murderer of Christchurch in 2019, but directly supported by the Russian state which many Western Leftists seem to think of as on their side.

Jonna Klick’s article on the failures of the Left in Germany to carve out its own response to the COVID-19 pandemic, government actions (and lack thereof) and the growth of fascist-influenced conspiracy theory should be studied intensely by the Left in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In particular, the phenomenon of the “conservative left” not only backing the science denial and refusal of social responsibility of the populist-Right, but the imperialist designs of the Russian state, is eerily similar between the two countries. The phenomenon of New Zealand’s conservative Left being given a platform by reactionaries to whitewash the increasingly violent and intolerant “anti-woke” movement as “socialist” or even “working class” should be deeply frightening.

But Jonna also points out the actually-existing Left’s lack of “leverage”. Once the State, in both countries, had decided to give up on a strategy of COVID elimination – under pressure from a business class which put profits over human lives, but also from an increasingly violent and extreme populist movement – the “lockdown Left” had no forces on its own side that could apply pressure in the opposite direction. Hand-wringing on Twitter or attempting to “shame” neoliberal politicians into doing a U-turn doesn’t seem to help. There is no substitute for a working-class based mass movement; failing to build one is to abdicate the politics of mass mobilisation to the reactionary forces who led violent riots outside Parliament in February, and are keen to do it again.



Notes on the International Question

by TYLER WEST

Author's note: This article has bubbled away in the background since the military coup d'état of the 1st February 2021 in Myanmar, I returned to it but still did not see fit to finish it during the Solomon Islands riots of late November 2021, and again during the great unrest which swept Kazakhstan in January 2022. Each time it has slipped back by the wayside as I simply have not been writing for the length of the pandemic. As I have been writing again of late, and with international events in mind, it seems fit to put this piece to paper, which culminated in an initial publication date of the 28th March 2022. As it has been rewritten repeatedly, I've done my best to update it to the current situation and make any necessary edits to the central argument. As a result, the argument may come across a little scattered at points, for which I apologise. At any rate...

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has given many on the left pause to reconsider their conceptions of imperialism and priorities on the world stage. An earnest reckoning with what has become a rote-learned and stultifying worldview among the left should be welcomed in these circumstances, such that it allows for a reassessment of world conditions and a new framework to be developed. This reckoning is long overdue, being needed since at least the end of the Cold War, and its absence has muddled prior attempts to find footing in assessing New Zealand's position in other international events, let alone what a coherent response might be.

Over the last decade or three, many events have attracted temporary interest before subsiding into the maelstrom of world affairs, never to be picked up again. In some instances, this is fair enough, an issue is nominally resolved on its own terms and ceases to demand as much attention. One might take the conflict and immediate aftermath of independence for East Timor, to draw a Pacific example. Attention started to drift away after the worst fighting subsided and had largely shifted elsewhere by the time peacekeepers were sailing over the horizon in 2005. In others, events overcame one another, sometimes in the same theatre. Barely had the two operations which comprised the 2006 Israel-Gaza War begun that events tumbled toward the Israel-Lebanon War in that same year. That is unlikely to happen in the case of this new escalation in Ukraine, but it will happen again in the next case without course correction. Without that correction, the chances of grasping a coherent framework sink toward zero.

Inherited ideas

Part of the problem is theoretical, an inherited idea of imperialism from prior eras of imperial excess stretched poorly onto new conditions. To those who cry of Lenin's theory it should be said that it is time to pick Lenin up and cast his words upon both the extant conditions of the world and the developments since Lenin's old wounds stole his final years. The 'unipolar order', if it ever really existed, has likely been in decay for as long as the neoliberal order has, which is to say since at least the 2008 Great Financial Crisis (in terms of world conflict, some point between the Russo-Georgian War and the rise and annihilation of the ISIS statelet). Some other order has surely been born, even if we are yet to quantify or name it.

Whether our moment resembles the 1970s, the 1930s, the 1900s, or no prior period at all has been hotly debated for years now. It does not need to be relitigated to be able to say that a great break occurred at some point fairly recently and we have not been able to pinpoint it or sufficiently analyse our current era. We have all, from the most ardent Marxist-Leninist to the most unreconstructed neoconservative, been chasing after history as it tears off in all directions around us. The only question is who has recognised this for what it is, and who is still working on a prewritten script while the stage burns around them.

Perhaps another part of the problem, for New Zealand anyway, is an unintentional parochialism. Some on the left find a set core of overseas

causes célèbres and don't really see fit to pay much attention to anything else, creating a kind of internationalist myopia in which a handful of things take up the entire view and complicating factors or outside events fall by the wayside. This is not a call for each and every individual who concerns themselves with such matters to take all the world's ills upon their mind, but for the movement (or movement in waiting) to which they belong to perform its job as the social brain which acts to alter the path of history. To be capable of meeting each crisis as it arises with cold-eyed rationality and not forget those crises which slip from world headlines and the popular conscience even as they worsen before our eyes. No one person could be asked to do more than they can, but the movement such that it exists can be asked as a generalised whole to grasp the problem.

The problem of numbers

An unquestionable problem is numbers. The extra-parliamentary and especially the nominally socialist left in this country is small, fragmented, geographically scattered, and lacking in resources. This makes any project or campaign a fraught matter if it doesn't draw initial support from elsewhere or at least a wide swathe of the extra-parliamentary left. With a raft of domestic issues to deal with, something like the ongoing anti-coup insurgency in Myanmar can slip through the attention cracks. It is not to say constant attention is needed from New Zealand, but the general situation should be kept in mind. This is merely one example. There could be many. Let us choose another.

Consider the Solomon Islands, wracked last November by the worst unrest since the civil war. They are not only a much closer neighbour, but New Zealand troops are still deployed there. How many could confidently say they knew the deployment alongside Australian and Fijian forces was provisionally extended in January to at least the end of March this year? At time of writing, it is entirely possible some new factor pushes out that date further (at time of initial publication, new events have occurred bringing the Solomons back into view). It did not require a laser focus on the Solomons to know that, just the curiosity to keep occasional tabs on the situation. The Solomons case is a useful one, as it serves to act as a lesson for those wanting to learn how inter-imperial competition could rip the bandage off open wounds in the social fabric of otherwise uninvolved countries. Not only that, but it provides that lesson *in a close Pacific neighbour to New Zealand*.

There could be other cases, Kazakhstan seems obvious, but the point is what keeping in touch with these events means for the New Zealand

left. Each is a lesson in class power, in imperial dynamics, in economic flow, in any number of things. More importantly, each is real. The socialist left is richer for being able to monitor the world situation effectively. It helps build the possibility of meaningful relationships with workers across national borders and with ethno-cultural minority workers within our own borders. It is one of the things that allows us to be internationalists.

What is to be done?

So, what of it? Why bring it up at all, what is the point? I would like, if I may, to make some suggestions. I do not presume of myself the power to make a declaration of what should be done and presume it will be so. I've never been a fan of that kind of sloganeering, or at least its wild overuse. But if I may outline what I'd like to see, at least it is out there, and I can say I have done that much. Before that, some background is necessary. We must survey where we are and where we stand.

As recently as the 1990s the left-media sphere in New Zealand was large enough that it could include a number of publications dedicated to international events either generally or of a specific focus. A prime example being the Free East Timor Coalition, which published *Nettalk* through the 1990s. Another might be the "Best Irish Paper in the Pacific", *Saoirse*, published over the 1980s-'90s, which existed among a once thriving constellation of Irish focused cultural/political organisations and outlets in New Zealand (many involving the recently late Jimmy O'Dea). The long running CORSO publication *Overview* kept a consistent eye on international events from the late 1970s through early 2000s. Similar groups exist today but few produce physical or digital periodicals for news and debate, and online forums are patchy and stretched across numerous topics. The tiny handful of socialist publications which exist dedicate some paper & ink to international topics, but their best efforts cannot but amount to a fairly small quantity of coverage. Sporadic publication, diverging editorial lines and formats, and the heavy weight of domestic and theoretical affairs make it an unfair ask on their own.

The existing groups which focus on this conflict or that national oppression are largely scattered and co-operate on an ad hoc basis. The Peace Action groups act as a functional node in the synaptic web of organisations. Their activities, in my opinion, should be commended at every turn. Similar could be said of Global Peace and Justice Aotearoa. It is not that they are insufficient (indeed they do more with very little than most could hope to) but that I am referring to a different kind of activity to their

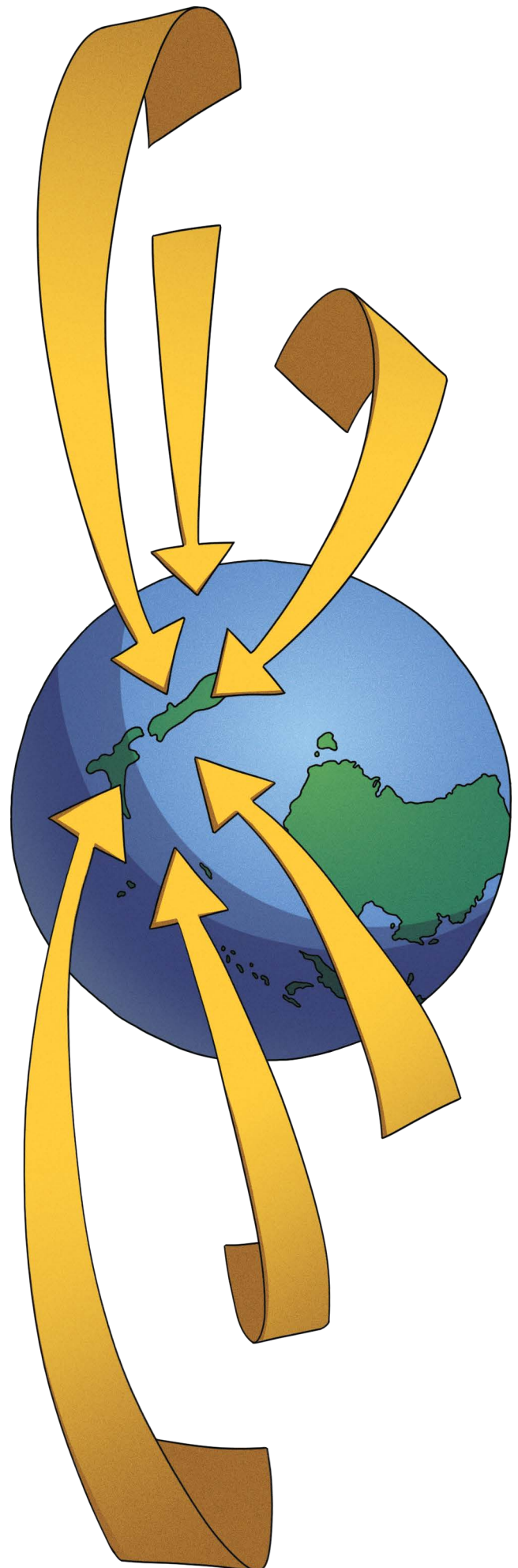
largely activist model. What I think is lacking is a national forum to keep the wider movement, such that it exists, abreast of international events. A point of connection which tallies up the sum total of existing international solidarity organisations in New Zealand and, with some degree of formality and structure, brings together the background coverage of their activities with a place to discuss international affairs generally. Something that can act as a locus for ongoing discussion while its contributors are focused on their own activities, sufficiently in-the-loop to keep abreast of internationalist actions in New Zealand but detached enough from the organising that the forum does not slip away, and the purpose lost.

In a way this is just one component of a wider need for a twofold (partial) solution to manifold problems faced by the New Zealand left. The first is the need for a central catalogue of active organisations of and of interest to the extra-parliamentary left in New Zealand, a resource to which the entire extra-parliamentary left can contribute to and benefit from. Such a resource has existed in part before and been attempted at times throughout the years but has never been fully realised on a national scale.

It could go a great way to connect at the level of the organisation, consolidate as social movements, help initiate those newly interested in the left, allay intra-left confusion and organising overload, and provide an agreeable project for cooperation.

The second is the need for a number of forums and sub-forums among the extra-parliamentary left on a number of topics which could provide similar benefits to those outlined above for an international & conflict forum, while retaining the structure needed to continue functioning through the contention and infighting inherent to political organisation.

Again, the infrastructure for these forums exists in a patchwork across the country – some of these conceptual forums effectively exist already. But the disconnection and lack of way for someone not already truly deeply embedded in the culture of the extra-parliamentary left to get their feet means that functionally it is as far away as existing solely on the drawing board. This country is in a sweet spot where in theory it is small enough for such infrastructure to exist but large enough for the infrastructure to sustain it to exist as well. It is a matter of cooperating across a geographical and socio-cultural divide which has long, perhaps always, hampered efforts at national coordination among the extra-parliamentary and socialist left. Whether it is possible to overcome such divides is not for me to say, but the thought's worth entertaining, right?



Pandemic insignificance:

how the left failed to defend life against capital during the COVID pandemic

By JONNA KLICK

Two years after the COVID-19 pandemic reached middle Europe it finally happened: I caught the virus. I was sick for two weeks, which I spent mostly in bed, despite three vaccine shots. Getting infected is not surprising right now, since Germany is in the highest wave of COVID-infections since the beginning of the pandemic right now (with more than 1700 infections per 100,000 people per week at the end of March, though it has decreased since then). At the same time, a lot of anti-COVID measures are being lifted, including mandatory masks in shops. I am recovered now, but not all are that lucky. Even though the vaccination gives relatively good protection, people can still suffer from long COVID and especially for vulnerable groups (e.g., with previous illnesses) there is still a significant risk of a severe course of the disease or death.

This situation is a result of the loud voices of COVID-denialists and individualists, but most of all of the fundamental function of the capitalist state that systematically prioritizes capital's interests over the health of workers and marginalized groups. In this piece I will look at responses to the pandemic from the left in Germany and try to analyse how it failed to counterpose those forces effectively. Germany may serve as an example here for the situation in many other European countries, but I will focus on Germany since I know more about the situation here and also since it was often called a good example for handling the pandemic during the first COVID wave in 2020.

Germany's reaction to COVID

When the pandemic started in China or even when the virus infected masses in Italy and also started spreading in Germany, very few people on the German left predicted that it was something that would affect "us" to a huge extent. Only

when there was the official recommendation to cancel events with over 1000 participants in the beginning of March 2020, people started to take it seriously. Things went fast then and two weeks later there was a lockdown with most shops closed and one was only allowed to meet one other person outside of one's own household in public.

This was of course a new situation since this kind of regulation of people's private lives has not been seen before, at least not in recent decades. However, to most people it soon became clear that COVID was a serious threat that should be acted upon – at least when there were pictures in the news that showed military trucks in Italy transporting dead bodies since the crematoriums were overloaded. So most statements from the left in this first wave tried to find a balance between, on one hand, criticizing authoritarian state measures such as those against people meeting in public, and on the other hand, agreeing on the necessity to fight the virus and calling for health safety measures (sometimes tending to emphasise one or the other position). The anti-authoritarian communist alliance "Ums Ganze" wrote:

The irrationality of capitalism becomes all the more apparent in the crisis: when meetings of more than two people are banned except at work, capitalism shows that it will go over dead bodies for its survival. The biggest corona parties do not take place illegally in playgrounds or parks, but are state-sponsored: every day in open-plan offices, Amazon fulfilment centres and the country's factories, as well as, not to be forgotten, in the refugee housing facilities where the state cramps the unwanted people together.¹

Broader interventions in the discourse from the left focussed on calling for health and safety for all. For example, there was a campaign by the anti-racist

1 <https://www.umsganze.org/no-time-to-die-corona-crisis-statement/>

alliance Seebrücke for the evacuation of the Moria refugee camp in Greece. Since normal demonstrations were not possible, protest took creative and decentralized forms, such as putting shoes on public squares to represent protesters, or holding signs while queuing in front of shops. In the first days of the lockdown, spontaneous networks of mutual aid were also formed; not only by leftist activists, but in many cities they played key roles in them. Those networks organized via messenger groups where people offered to do grocery shopping for people who were either in quarantine or who were elderly or other members of vulnerable groups and did not want to risk an infection while shopping. There was a huge willingness from many people to offer those acts of mutual aid that outnumbered those that needed or wanted it by far.

However, there were also some demonstrations that downplayed or denied the threat of the pandemic. They came mostly from esoteric and conspiracy-theorist milieus and the far right, but also some people from the cultural sectors and leftists participated in them. This combination was quite similar to that of the red-brown “peace protests” that spread over Germany during the annexation of the Crimea in 2014, where those forces had taken a conspiracy-theorist and pro-Putin position.

Neither the party Die Linke (“The Left”) nor the trade unions offered their own answer to the pandemic, but mostly accepted the stance of the government, a coalition of Social Democrats and the conservative CDU/CSU. However, some members of Die Linke, including MPs, sympathized with or participated in the denialist protests.

Quickly, neoliberal voices, e.g., from the liberal party FDP, also called for loosening the restrictions for economic reasons, which many on the left criticized as an attempt to sacrifice the health of workers and marginalized groups for the interests of capital.

However, when the number of cases went down and restrictions were loosened in May, there was no resistance against the loosening, even though some – including on the left – warned that this might be too early. Many people were also happy that there was a partial “return to normal”, and many leftists were happy to be able to do demonstrations and events again, even though many leftists acted more carefully than others. The pandemic was not really an issue that the left or progressive social movements acted upon during the summer of 2020. It was, however, for those reactionary forces that kept on protesting against the restrictions that were still in place, mainly mandatory masks. That movement began to organize mainly under the label of “Querdenken” (“lateral thinking”). There were some counterdemonstrations by Antifa groups, but they were mostly outnumbered by the Querdenken-protesters.

Flattening the curve

By loosening the restrictions as soon as the number of cases went down, the German government like most governments chose a “flatten the curve” strategy. This means that measures are implemented to keep infections low enough to prevent the collapse of the health system, but as long as the health system is not under threat of collapse, infections and deaths are tolerated. This shows that a simple demand for a better health system with more capacity – as good and supportable as it is – is not a sufficient leftist answer to the pandemic. In the context of a “flatten the curve” strategy, more capacity in the health system would actually mean more cases and more deaths since they do not threaten the health system’s collapse. An alternative to the “flatten the curve” strategy is to prevent outbreaks at all, a zero-COVID strategy as implemented by New Zealand but also China in the early waves. A few eco-socialists already called for this during the first wave in Germany and Austria. The third kind of strategy is that of uncontrolled infection, called for by many forces on the far right. This led to mass deaths in countries where the far right is in power, such as Brazil. It was however also adopted by non-far-right governments, like Sweden.

In the context of decisions by governments of capitalist states (China included of course), all three strategies are different attempts to find a balance between two interests: On the one hand, making sure that the population does not get sick or die en masse (because that could bring into question the government’s legitimacy, but also because it needs a relatively healthy population as a workforce); on the other hand, making sure that capitalist production and circulation do not get interrupted for too long, since economic growth is the base of the power of every capitalist state. Capitalist states need economic growth to provide their population with jobs and to earn tax money in order to finance whatever the state wants to do. Which strategy a government chooses, and which is the best way to balance those two interests, may change depending on context, and governments are also capable of making decisions that are bad even from their point of view – especially if there are two potentially conflicting interests. A radical left or Marxist point of view, in my opinion, should prioritize the health of workers and marginalized groups, and work towards an end of the capitalist growth imperative that endangers peoples’ health as well as the environment.

But let’s go back to the course of the pandemic in Germany. In autumn and winter, cases were rising again and got a lot higher than in the first wave. However, the federal government as well as the

state governments (who made most decisions concerning the pandemic together) hesitated to decide on another lockdown. In November 2020, they introduced a “lockdown-light” which meant restrictions on the number of people that were allowed to meet, bars and restaurants were closed, but other workplaces as well as shops and schools stayed open. Several voices on the left criticized this imbalance between harsh measures for activities in people’s leisure time and few to no restrictions on most workplaces. That changed only slightly, when a harsher lockdown with shop and school closures was introduced in December as cases kept rising. The virus seems to stop spreading when people do things that raise the GDP, was a common joke in those days. Die Linke mainly criticized that the government instead of the parliament held power over most decisions concerning lockdowns, but besides that it again did not promote a distinct position.

It was scientists across Europe who acted more politically than most politically active leftists in this situation by publishing the call “Contain Covid” on 19 December, arguing for a zero-COVID-strategy. Finally, some leftists from Germany but also other countries in Europe spoke out in favour of that strategy and formed the campaign “Zero Covid”. They called for a just shutdown accompanied by a redistribution of wealth, and stressed the importance of also shutting down workplaces and lifting patents on the vaccines that slowly started to be available. However, no bigger organization supported “Zero Covid”, it consisted mainly of individual leftist intellectuals and activists from undogmatic, libertarian communist, eco-socialist and Trotskyist traditions. Many other leftists from different factions ranging from Die Linke to anarchists criticized “Zero Covid” for demanding “authoritarian” state measures. The question of how to implement a “Zero Covid” strategy was also debated within the campaign. The campaign did manage to make their voice heard and was debated in newspapers, despite not being a movement with a presence on the streets. It is hard to say if it achieved anything besides that. At least, there was now a distinct leftist position regarding the pandemic, while previously the discussion was only between the line of the government and calls for loosening restrictions from the right. Maybe “Zero Covid” thus managed to prevent a quicker loosening in spring 2021, but the implementation of a proper Zero Covid strategy never seemed even close to being carried out.

“Free Left”, conservative left

Warmer temperatures as well as vaccinations brought cases down in summer 2021. Vaccination

now started to be the main issue concerning the pandemic. Querdenken, which had been full of anti-vaxxers from the beginning, now made this their main concern, while leftists – no matter how their position had otherwise been on measures against the pandemic – mainly called for lifting the patents and making the vaccines accessible globally. However, there were no mass protests for that demand, even though Germany is until today one of the main forces globally to uphold the “necessity” of patents for the COVID vaccines. There were also some vaccine-sceptical voices on the left, the most prominent being the politician Sahra Wagenknecht from Die Linke. Wagenknecht is a picture book example of conservative leftism (she even claims that term for herself) and takes over every reactionary talking point that becomes popular. Some leftists even formed an outright red-brown organization, the “Freie Linke” (“free left”) and participated in Querdenken-protests. They seem to come from different factions of the left, including autonomists and anarchists, but mainly from the conservative leftist crowd of Sahra Wagenknecht-supporters. A critical investigative research by the anarchist podcasters “Übertage” who participated in their meetings revealed a wild melange of Marxist jargon and far-right conspiracy theories in the talking points of “Freie Linke”. It also showed that “Freie Linke” is well connected to the leadership of Querdenken.

After the federal elections in October 2021, a new government was formed consisting of Social Democrats, Greens and the liberal FDP. The latter had been the party most critical of anti-COVID measures (with the exception of the far right AfD who took more extreme talking points and tried to be the parliamentary arm of Querdenken).

During winter 2021/22 with a high number of COVID cases, there were thus only very few restrictions, most of which only concerned unvaccinated people. Fortunately, the vaccines prevented a lot of severe cases and the number of COVID patients in intensive care units was no higher than in the previous winter. Since the collapse of the health system was thus prevented, the strategies of “flatten the curve” and unrestricted contamination are now becoming the same, and the government is tolerating high numbers of infections and most restrictions are lifted. With the exception of some hashtag-campaigns, there is no resistance against this development and critical voices, e.g., from “Zero Covid” seem to be rather insignificant in public discourse. The war in Ukraine is now also overshadowing almost any other issue. Some of the COVID-denialists, including “Freie Linke” are now also shifting to this issue, and adopting reactionary Putin-apologist positions. At the same time, most on the left are struggling to take a clear

stance in solidarity with Ukrainian resistance against Russian invasion. One could see a parallel here between the relative insignificance of the left in the face of the pandemic as well as in the face of Russian imperialism – but here is not the place to elaborate on that, and I will focus on the pandemic.

Where was the left response?

So what are the reasons why the left did not manage to take a clear stance for defending the health of workers and marginalized groups against the interests of capital and the capitalist state?

On the one hand, there seems to be a general problem that “we” as leftist groups, organizations or movements are not very good at reacting to new situations, to crises that we may not have foreseen and where we would have to develop a new analysis and act upon it. If the left reacts at all it is often by saying things it has said before and thinks are somehow fitting for the current crisis, e.g., “more money for the healthcare system” when the pandemic hits or “against all wars” when Russia invades Ukraine. And those slogans are often right, but they still fail to really answer the questions that new complex situations pose. It is still an open question to me how we can develop ways to organize, analyse and react in situations that we did not prepare for before. But it is crucial that we pose ourselves this question and look for answers since if we are not able to act in historical turning points, we will not have a meaningful impact on the course of history (in the direction of emancipatory goals) at all.

However, I think there are also some specific issues that one can point out concerning the pandemic. I will first focus on those on the left that opposed or at least did not support a “Zero Covid”-position and tended towards playing down the pandemic, or even went into alliances with the far-right and conspiracy theorists.

One of these problems is that there is a lack of understanding for natural processes like the exponential growth of virus infections, as eco-socialist and “Zero Covid”-initiator Christian Zeller also points out. The virus is not something that we can negotiate with. The range to make compromises between different goals, e.g., of not limiting “personal freedoms” and of containing the virus, is limited by the virus’s feature to grow exponentially once it is allowed to do. Most politics, and here I mean mainstream politics, are concerned about making compromises between different goals. This becomes catastrophic when natural forces are ignored, which is also true for

climate change. Concerning climate change, the left is often good at pointing out this problem, but when it came to the pandemic many left positions actually reproduced the same problem. This problem is deepened in some factions of the left by a postmodernist approach of viewing reality as primarily constructed through discourse. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who ignores the reality of the virus and sees the crisis as primarily a discourse used to justify biopolitical control, is an example of how postmodernism can go dangerously wrong. While there are some good insights from poststructuralist and postmodernist theories about discourse, the left needs to be able to analyse the materiality of the metabolism between human and nature if it wants to be able to answer to the crises set off by capitalist human-nature relations.

Another problem is the question of how we analyse the state. Anarchism sometimes tends to see the state as an institution that simply oppresses, dominates and controls people out of pure evil. This kind of view lacks a materialist analysis of the role of the state within capitalist society, meaning that the main function is actually to secure good conditions for capital accumulation. While the former view tends to only criticize oppressive things that the state does, e.g., restrictions on how many people are allowed to meet during a pandemic, a materialist analysis can also analyse and criticize the state’s inaction when it comes to protecting people’s health. While both views conclude that the state cannot be used for our ends and that we need to fight for the things we want against the state and finally abolish it, they come to quite different conclusions when looking at how the state deals with the pandemic.

Sometimes connected to this tendency within Anarchism is an individualist understanding of freedom. The state then oppresses my individual freedom to do whatever I want. This notion of freedom is not something specifically anarchist (and social anarchist currents do not share it), but it is indeed the mainstream liberal bourgeois understanding of freedom. The pandemic showed that any emancipatory concept of freedom needs to centre the dependency between us all. If it is “freedom” to go around unmasked and infect everyone with COVID, this cannot be a useful concept for the left. Instead, we should understand freedom as the collective capacity to form our social relations in a way that allows us to care for each other.

Those forces on the left that sympathized or participated in the Querdenken protests shared all of these problems, and in addition also that of a lazy populism that supports every position that is being shouted in the streets, no matter

how reactionary it is. Interestingly, this position is itself inconsistent since during the pandemic, the Querdenken position was always a minority, even though a loud one. At most times, the majority either supported the state's anti-COVID measures or actually thought they were not strong enough.

On the other hand, those on the left that did support a "Zero Covid" position also have to ask ourselves why this did not become a significant force. The fact that a lot of people and organizations on the left did not share this position can only be a partial answer. Another part is that the problem lies in the matter of the pandemic itself: People who are not afraid of getting infected or infecting others have no problem of taking to the streets in masses while the more careful people who tend to support a "Zero Covid" strategy also tend to hesitate more before going to protests. But the insignificance of "Zero Covid" also points to the same problem that causes the relative insignificance of radical leftist positions in general: our groups and organizations are small and barely rooted within the working class. From a materialist analysis of the capitalist state, it is clear that publishing a call alone will never move the state towards shutting down the economy. The only way to introduce a "Zero Covid" strategy in Germany would have been by shutting down the economy ourselves through mass strikes. Most of the intellectuals who signed the call probably knew that. It is still good that they did publish this call, since pointing out alternatives to the status quo even when there are now forces to push through these alternatives has a value in itself and maybe makes it more possible to do things differently in the future.

It is still unclear how the COVID pandemic will develop in the next couple of years and if new variants will make it more dangerous again. But it is clear that in the future, capitalist agriculture as well as climate change will lead to more frequent pandemics. That is why we should try to learn from what happened during the COVID pandemic.



Nationalism and authoritarianism in the Balkans

By BYRON CLARK

The violence that occurred in the western Balkans in the 1990s has shaped the region's politics to this day. An uneasy peace has been maintained but as Russia acts on its imperial ambitions in Ukraine Putin's support of groups in the Balkans who glorify the war criminals who committed atrocities against the region's Muslim populations and harbour desires for ethnostates means that violence could once again erupt.

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia into nation states, ethnically-Serb separatists in the new state of Bosnia carried out a genocide of the predominantly Muslim Bosniak population with the goal of creating a Greater Serbia in the region. Those events gave the world the euphemism "ethnic cleansing" and led to the deaths of over 100,000 people. The conflict ended with an agreement that saw Bosnia governed by a tripartite presidency representing the country's three major ethnic groups- Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. Milorad Dodik, president of Republika Srpska, Bosnia's Serb-dominated autonomous region, denies that any genocide took place, describing it as a "myth" and a "deception." He has long been advocating for the region's secession, to become part of Serbia.

Dodik has chastised members of the European Parliament for not opposing the "Bosnian Islamic state" he believes Muslim Bosniaks are planning.² At the meeting where he made those comments he was echoed by Dragan Čović, leader of the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina political party, and a former member of the tripartite presidency, who joined Dodik in blaming Bosniaks for trying to establish "a unitary Islamic state".

In February Dodik moved to pull the Republika Srpska out of key national institutions, such as the tax system and judiciary. He also announced plans to set up a separate military, something the *Washington Post* described as essentially resurrecting the forces that carried out the massacre of eight thousand people in Srebrenica in 1995. Over the past fifteen years Dodik has cultivated a relationship with Russia, which has served the interests of both his secessionist movement and the Kremlin.³ Last December, Russian President Vladimir Putin pledged to support Bosnian Serbs in their disputes over power-sharing. Russian investment in Republika Srpska has ensured a cheap source of raw resources for Moscow, and established a useful strategic offshore satellite. Following the invasion of Ukraine, the EU almost doubled the peacekeeping force in Bosnia as a precautionary measure.⁴

The Biden administration had announced new sanctions against Dodik in January, accusing him of "corrupt activities" and undermining the U.S.-brokered Dayton accord which ended the war in 1995 and established the tripartite presidency.

Writing in 2014, Bosnian political scientist Jasmin Mujanović described Dodik as "Moscow's man in Banja Luka".⁵ In light of the situation in Ukraine Dodik has advocated for Bosnia-Herzegovina to remain neutral in the conflict – a decision that requires the backing of all three presidency members.⁶ The two others, Šefik Džaferović and Željko Komšić support sanctions against Russia. Dodik has accused them of toppling the constitution and hence the state, with Komšić responding that Dodik was implementing Putin's plan of destabilisation.⁷ This view was shared by Džaferović, who told *The Guardian* that Dodik:

2 <https://www.boell.de/en/2022/03/28/eu-must-stop-appeasing-putins-puppets-bosnia>

3 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lidiakurasinska/2022/02/23/as-the-world-watches-ukraine-possibility-of-disintegration-looms-in-bosnia/?sh=190f0a45410d>

4 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bosnias-pro-russian-serb-leader-tried-stop-countrys-un-vote-report-2022-03-03/>

5 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/moscows-man-in-banja-luka/>

6 https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/dodik-ready-to-block-bihs-decision-to-join-eus-russia-sanctions/

7 https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/dodik-tries-to-push-for-bihs-neutral-stance-towards-russia/

is encouraged in his behaviour by Russia, which is always keen on showing that it can destabilise the soft underbelly of the EU and NATO.

These are dark days for Europe and the whole world. We are witnessing something that is horrible. We saw a similar horror here in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s.⁸

Neighbouring Serbia is “definitely back on the path towards strongman rule” according to Jasmin Mujanović. Aleksandar Vučić has served as president since 2017. Early in his term he was the target of protest as a result of clamping down on free media and on NGOs critical of the government, and by labelling large segments of Serbia’s parliamentary opposition as anti-state elements. Vučić has attempted to maintain close relationships with both Western Europe and Putin’s Russia.⁹ Tabloids loyal to him have spent the last five years spreading pro-Putin propaganda. Protesters waving Russian flags and carrying pictures of Putin have marched in Belgrade to demonstrate their support for Russia.

Far-right groups have been among the protesters. Damijan Knezevic of the People’s Patrol spoke at one rally wearing the letter Z on his jacket, the letter has become a symbol of support for Russian militarism. The Kremlin-backed bikers’ club Night Wolves also participated, as did a number of individuals previously accused of fighting alongside Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. Mladen Obradovic, leader of the banned Serbian far-right group Obraz described Russia as “a beacon of freedom,” claiming that “That is why we, the Serbs, have an obligation to stand by our Mother Russia.”

“Since they first went out into the streets, they have always advocated for ‘Mother Russia’ and claimed that Serbia belongs with Russia, not in the European Union,” Darko Sper told BIRN (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network).¹⁰ Sper is an activist with the NGO coalition Civic Vojvodina who have organised rallies in support of Ukraine.

The crowd at the rally chanted the names of Vladimir Putin and Bosnian Serb war criminal Ratko Mladic, who is currently serving a life sentence for his role in the Srebrenica genocide.

“The Serbian people have not forgotten all that Vladimir Putin did for the survival of the Serbian people,” claimed Srdjan Letic, who travelled

from the Bosnian town of Brcko to attend the rally in Belgrade. Letic is the leader of Sveti Georgije. The group claims that they carry out humanitarian work- with the help of two cars presented as a gift by the Russian embassy in Bosnia. Notably Letic was convicted in 2007 of falsifying banknotes and trading in weapons.

Russians wanting to leave the country have found Serbia to be one of the only options on the continent, with regular flights leaving Russia for Serbia at a time when other countries have banned them, but emigrants aiming to flee the regime are then finding themselves among some of its strongest supporters. “Some locals tell me they support Russia when they learn I am from Russia,” a former travel agent now living in Belgrade told AFP. “They say it to express their support, but it turns out this support extends to supporting Putin and his actions and the war.”¹¹

Vučić’s regime has backed the U.N. resolution that deploring Russia’s aggression, but rejected sanctions on Russia. A stance *Politico* described as trying “to take his balancing act to a new level”.¹² The relationship between Russia and Serbia predates Vučić. In 1999 Russia opposed NATO’s bombing of Serbia (Putin has more recently cited the NATO bombing, which did not have U.N. Security Council approval, in attempting to justify his military incursion into Ukraine.)

NATO’s intervention in Kosovo, where Serbia was persecuting the predominantly Muslim ethnic Albanian population arguably prevented a repeat of the genocide that had occurred in neighbouring Bosnia four years prior. “The atrocities of the 1990s had taught many American opinion makers that they could not simultaneously demand both an end to genocide and a policy of non-intervention,” wrote Samantha Power in *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*. “Diplomacy without the meaningful threat of military force had too often failed to deter abuse”. NATO bombing in Serbia was not done for purely humanitarian reasons, according to Power, and likely would not have occurred without the perceived threat to US interests.

Kosovo president Vjosa Osmani told *The Guardian* that Russia is attempting to destabilise the western Balkans.¹³ Prime Minister Albin Kurti believes that the country is significant in Putin’s plan to expand Russian power in Europe “He wants the state of Kosovo to fail in order to show that NATO success was temporary, just like in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

8 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/11/russia-may-pressure-serbia-to-undermine-western-balkans-leaders-warn>

9 <https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-russia-serbia-aleksandar-vucic/>

10 <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/03/10/at-pro-russian-balkan-rallies-a-whos-who-of-the-far-right/>

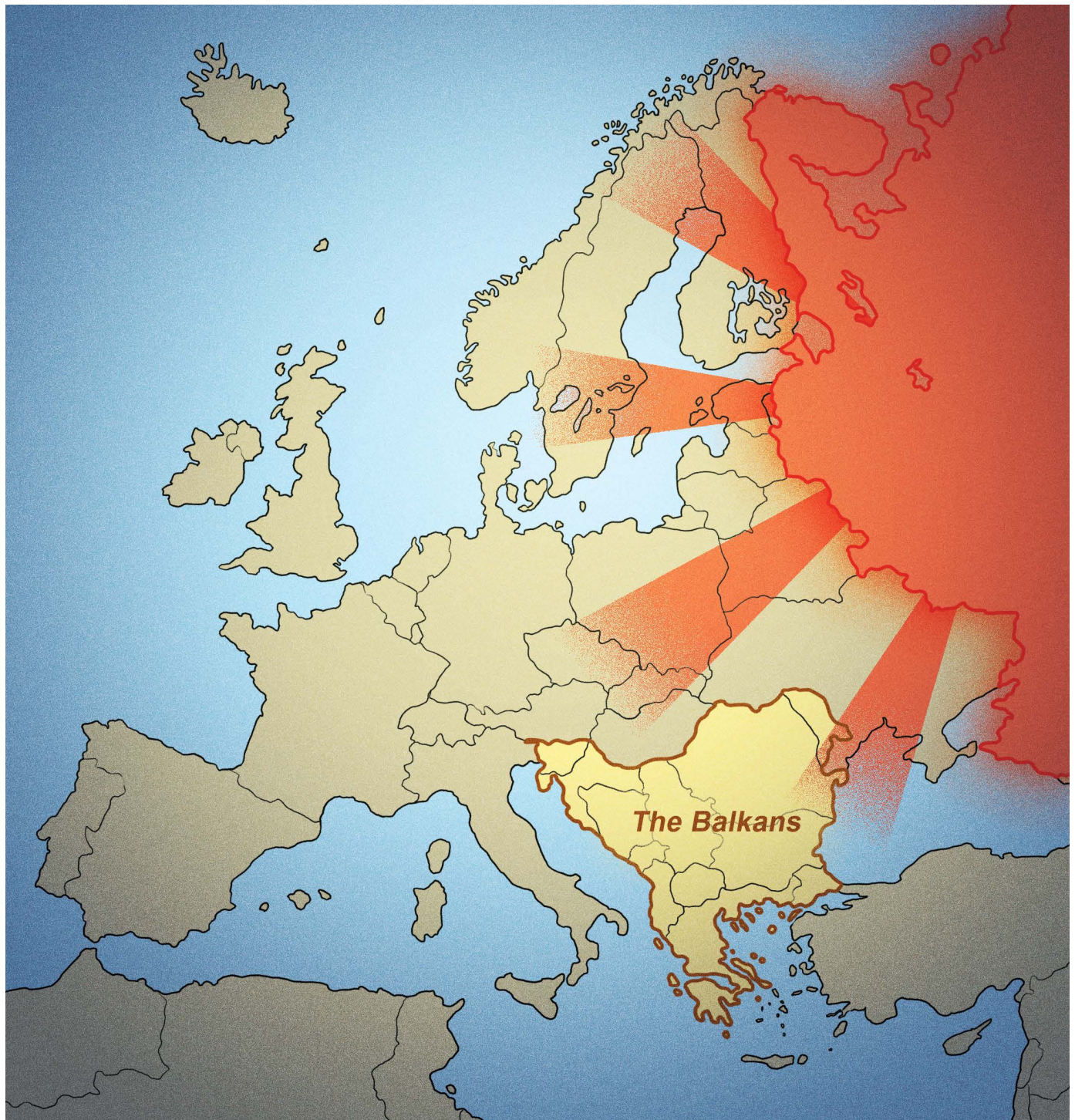
11 <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/25/fleeing-putin-russians-resettle-in-pro-kremlin-serbia-a77078>

12 <https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-russia-serbia-aleksandar-vucic/>

13 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/11/russia-may-pressure-serbia-to-undermine-western-balkans-leaders-warn>

In early March the Bosnian branch of the Night Wolves organised a rally in Trebinje in southern Bosnia. Deputy leader Goran Tadic – who is the official driver of Republika Srpska energy and mining minister Petar Djokic – was in attendance, carrying a Russian flag. The Night Wolves also had a presence at a rally in the Montenegrin capital, Podgorica, alongside members of the Serb nationalist Ravnogora Chetnik Movement. The original Chetniks were Serbian nationalists that collaborated with the Nazis in fighting communist Partisans during the second world war. The Ravnogora Chetnik Movement has been accused of financing the travel of volunteer fighters from the Balkans to eastern Ukraine.

Russia wants to maintain a sphere of influence in eastern Europe, a buffer zone between the Russian Federation and the countries in the European Union (and/or NATO) regardless of the outcome of the war in Ukraine, it will likely continue to exert influence over the nations of the Balkans via its support for Serbian nationalists and far-right groups, this could be disastrous for the region's minority Muslim population.



Russia's Invasion of Ukraine – an interview with Eric Draitser

Transcript of an interview originally broadcast on March 12th, on the podcast *Where's My Jetpack*. Transcribed by John Smith.

Ani White: Kia ora, welcome, comrades, to Where's My Jetpack, a politics and pop culture podcast with sci-fi and socialist leanings. I'm Ani White...

Derek Johnson: ...And I'm Derek Johnson. Hola, comrades. Apologies for the delay in episodes, which is due to personal health circumstances being in America and Florida, but we're back with an episode on the invasion of Ukraine. We're interviewing Eric Draitser, an independent political analyst and host of CounterPunch Radio. You can find his exclusive content, including articles, podcasts, audio commentaries, poetry and more at patreon.com/EricDraitser. He can be located at EricDraitser@gmail.com and we'll put all the links [in the blog description].

Welcome to the show, Eric.

Eric Draitser: Thanks so much for having me.

Ani White: Yeah, thanks for coming on.

So, we've been watching your daily YouTube videos, and also Facebook and that. And you've been reporting back on Russian-language media. Can you give us some context for your own connections to Russia and Ukraine?

Eric Draitser: Yeah. Well, I will say that I have been monitoring all kinds of media, all kinds of press. I'm not 100% fluent in the sense that I can speak Russian very well. But reading complicated subjects like political issues and analysis and things like that can be a little bit difficult. But I do monitor Russian press as much as I can. I try to keep up with all the different outlets as much as I can for the purposes of, as you said, kind of taking that information and distilling it down into pieces that people can absorb and then use to sort of formulate their own analysis. And I think that we have a major sort of gap on the left in the alternative media when it comes to being able to analyse these kinds of things, especially a conflict as complicated, politically charged and

ideologically divisive – and whatever – as this one. I've found that for various reasons that we probably won't have time to go into, but for various reasons, there seems to be a real lack of solid analysis that can be truly understood as objective, that sees the situation for what it is, rather than cheerleading NATO or cheerleading Russia. Hopefully I am able to provide that for people and to help them pick through what I think is definitely the most complicated and propagandised and disinformation laden conflict in our lifetimes.

Not just a crime, but a blunder

Ani White: How do you characterise the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

Eric Draitser: How do I characterise it? I mean, it's a lot of different things. I think probably first and foremost, we should say that it's an egregious war crime. I mean, it's a crime against the general peace as established in Nuremberg. It is the supreme crime, as the Nuremberg precedent established, that is the crime against peace. So it is that. Now we must say, just so that our political or at least my political orientation can be understood, this is not to ignore the fact that the United States has committed the very same supreme crime countless times in my own lifetime, all over the world. So I don't mean to suggest that what Russia is doing in Ukraine is without precedent. These kinds of war crimes have precedents. However, just because the United States is a serial war crimes perpetrator doesn't mean that Russia somehow is absolved of having committed this egregious crime. And I think that's an important point to establish because you see a lot of people allegedly on the left who really do genuflect about this idea about whether or not this is some kind of crime against humanity, which it most certainly and clearly is.

Now, that being said, beyond just being a crime, this is a blunder. I believe this is a blunder of historic proportions. I think it will be remembered as such years, decades, maybe even centuries from now when historians look back on this period and Russia's invasion of Ukraine as an extreme blunder by the Russian state that undoubtedly led to all kinds of other things that we still today can't foresee because we're just at the beginning of this. So it marks a turning point. It marks a turning point in what we've historically called the post-Cold War period. The post-Cold War understanding of the world seems to have evaporated, at least in the sense that the United States is a single global imperial hegemon that guarantees a sort of Pax Americana, Peace in Europe, et cetera. These things have sort of gone out the window now, as we see not only the economic rise of China and sort of a more aggressive rise from Russia and Turkey and other countries in the world, but now we see it spilling over into what we would call a theatre of conflict and the creation of a theatre of conflict by the Russian invasion. So this really also, I think, in my view, needs to be sort of understood, at least to some extent as being established in precedent by the neocons [neoconservatives] and what they did in Iraq. Let's not forget that the invasion of Iraq was predicated on a series of lies, each of which fell apart to only be supplanted by the next one. It was pushed forward by ideological, I would say, criminals, ideologically driven neocons who are non-military men, but who were driven by an ideology of imperial power. And that was rooted in the idea that they are, as Karl Rove famously said, "we are the creators of reality and with every decision we make, we create a reality, and you are left to analyse our decisions. And while you analyse them, we make new decisions to create new realities." That's Karl Rove in 2004 quoted by Ron Suskind or allegedly Karl Rove, although he claims he never said that.

So this is something that is, I think, really critical to understanding Putin and understanding the Russian view on the world. The Russian view on the world says that we are not to be treated as second class. We can do anything that the United States can do. And now what we see is that Russia is trying, or was trying, to establish that it too can do imperialism, right. And that's unfortunately, how we've blundered into. And by we, I mean the world has blundered into this nightmare, disastrous scenario.

Derek Johnson: What is your take on supposed leftists or anti imperialists who go even farther to make a case for Putin?

Eric Draitser: It's interesting because in some ways it's a continuation of a divide that's been present on the left. And I mean, when I say the left, I guess

we should probably be even more specific and really say the terminally online left, because the left is much more broad than the sort of insane sliver that you see on Twitter and Facebook and the rest of it. I mean, the left involves all kinds of different elements of our society. It includes unions and grassroots organizations and all kinds of things that exist in the real world that are not really reduced to this chattering on social media. But I know what you mean. We're talking about sort of the vocal sections of the online left. This is in some senses a continuation of the divides over Syria, the divides over Trump and 'Russiagate' and a lot of other things. But ultimately this is rooted in something that I've been talking about since at least 2015. And that is what I consider to be the infiltration of anti-imperialism, the infiltration of anti-imperialism with what you might call a sort of fascist and fascist collaborating element that sees anti-imperialism as being able to align with any and all forces that are in opposition to the United States and to the global Empire. In other words, it's what you might call a sort of vulgar anti-imperialism, just like we would call reduction to strictly economic analysis as a kind of vulgar Marxism that ignores race and identity and gender and all of these other things that we understand to be critical today. And just as vulgar Marxism is to a large extent rooted in everything from a kind of white supremacist attitude to a lack of understanding of the way the world actually works. Similarly, vulgar anti-imperialism is a complete misunderstanding of the nature of imperialism today, in my view.

And I should know because I used to very much have a lot of those views. And I'll just explain what I mean. I grew up, or I shouldn't say I grew up, but my politics are forged around the Iraq war. I was in college when the Iraq war was launched. I was in the 12th grade on 9/11, and then the next year we were at war in Iraq. I was a freshman in college. It was my first real exposure to politics outside of the right wing Zionist neocon politics of my parents in the house that I grew up in. So for me, it was an eye-opener and I really began to form a world view rooted around the way in which the United States uses imperial power and the way in which the United States is in many ways the root cause of so many conflicts and problems in the world. As I sort of evolved from there, my understanding of things like imperialism began to become more, I guess you could say, mature or evolve. My understanding of the mechanisms of power began to evolve and I sort of began to call myself an anti-imperialist. And seeing the world as the product of the forces of Empire, just as Lenin wrote more than 100 years ago, and seeing that the United States really was the global bully, the global imperial hegemon.

What's happened since, I would say about 2015 or so, is that things continue to evolve globally, and China's rise, of course, and Russia's return as a military power and all of these things and Turkey expanding its footprint, Turkey having won multiple wars just in the last few years, these changes globally – and of course, Trump and all of the domestic conflict in the United States that has kind of turned at least some of that attention that the US would normally have reserved for the rest of the world inward – you've seen other sub imperialist, Patrick Bond would say, sub imperial powers rising, and that has, in my view, changed dramatically the dynamics of the period that we're living through so that it is no longer 1997 or 2003 or even 2010. We are now in a very different period of global history, one in which we have competing imperialisms. And I say all of that, I say all of that, only to say that those who would even dare make excuses for these war crimes and crimes against humanity that Russia is carrying out, are those who have completely misunderstood these changes, these shifts over the recent years, and who have for various reasons, some of which are self-interested, some of which are driven by ego, some of which are just misunderstandings and failures to understand that has led to what I said, a vulgar anti-imperialism that interprets anti-imperialism as being anything that opposes the United States. But the problem with that, then, is that you misunderstand the fact that what we actually are witnessing is neoliberal imperialism coming up against a kind of far right imperialism. Ultimately this conflict is the nature of what we're actually dealing with. And that camp on the left that can't understand that, well, of course they're going to make excuses for Russia.

Anti-imperialism or anti-US?

Derek Johnson: I first started seeing it, I know, being politically active in the early 2000s there of seeing how ANSWER and all these different groups that were anti-war were taking these sides of supporting the Shining Path and supporting all these other really weird positions of siding with dictatorships and anything against America. I found that strange going back all the way to, I remember NATO going into Yugoslavia, and it was like that was some of my first exposures to different kind of sectarianisms and factionalisms on the left, where I kind of saw how some people on the left were like, defending Milošević. It's like I saw how bad NATO was, and yet there was different sides of it that struck me very strange in that way of like, okay, but why would you support Milošević?

Eric Draitser: Yeah, I guess I have a sort of take on that, that's again, is sort of rooted in my own experiences. And it was extremely – Derek, you

probably remember this – but it was extremely, extremely unpopular to protest against the war in Iraq. You would be name-called. You would have people yelling at you. Whatever it was.

Derek Johnson: Right.

Eric Draitser: Often one of the most common things you would hear is “Saddam gassed his own people. He gassed the Kurds. What? Do you love Saddam? Why don't you go live in Iraq?” And I learned then that it doesn't really matter what you say and what you stand for, these people are going to find a way to twist it and turn it on you. But the truth is that you can oppose a war against a country despite the leader of that country not being a good guy. You didn't have to support Saddam to be opposed to the Iraq war. And that is true in a number of other examples, each of which I think is different. But it's splitting hairs. It doesn't really matter because ultimately the point is to oppose an imperialist war. And as an American citizen, as a US citizen, obviously, I always saw my primary responsibility as opposing the United States. And a lot of these Russia apologists, these Kremlin propagandists and stuff, they say that today. They say, well, if you're in the United States, your job is to oppose NATO. Well, yes, and I do.

But my job is also not to misrepresent the nature of this war, not to pretend that the side that started it isn't the side that started it, not to pretend that crimes against humanity that are being committed aren't being committed, or that if they are being committed, the people that are perpetrating them aren't actually responsible for it, because the other side actually did all these other things, right? It's not about trying to find a nuanced position, it's just about understanding the complexity of the world that oftentimes if you are anti-imperialist, what that actually means, in my view, it's opposing imperialism. It's not opposing the United States. It's opposing imperialism. In this case. This is Russian imperialism. I know everybody wants to just act like it's heresy to even suggest it, but I even had somebody on Twitter being like, “have you even read Lenin?” And I'm like, “what? Are you fucking kidding me? I've read Lenin's Imperialism like, a dozen times. Do you think Lenin, if you were alive today, would look at what Russia is doing and be like, yeah, no, that's not imperialism.” I mean, come on, people need to be serious. By the way, speaking of Lenin, Lenin has been endlessly bashed by Putin through all of this process because Lenin and the Russian revolution, irrespective of any mistakes that came later. One of the issues was self-determination for the peoples of the Russian Empire. That's what created Ukraine. Ukraine exists because the Empire was dismantled. And so that's one of the things that Putin absolutely can't stand.

These right wing oligarchs and the revival of the Orthodox Church and sort of nostalgia for the Tsars and all of this. They absolutely can't stand the fact that in 1917, a revolution took place that ended the Empire and gave self determination to Ukraine.

Derek Johnson: Yeah, there's quite a few people who even insist that there's no such thing as Russian imperialism, that only America can be imperialist.

Eric Draitser: Well, there is an element of truth to that. But the problem is that it is like reducing a pretty complex issue to a very, very narrowly defined point. Yes, it is true that if you're talking about the levers of global finance, only the United States sort of reaches that level. I mean, look, the United States was able to shut off the Russian Central Bank off of three quarters of its reserves. That is imperialism. That is power. The United States being able to just shut a country out of its money. I mean, come on, that is serious imperial power. But it is not to say that a former imperial power that then invades essentially a former colony for the purposes of more or less dismembering that country, seizing its resources, imposing a puppet government, and essentially dictating terms – I don't know what else that is, but imperialism.

Derek Johnson: Yeah. What do you think is motivating Putin and the Russian regime?

Eric Draitser: Boy, that's tough. I wish I knew. I mean, as with all wars, there are many factors from many different ways that one can look at interests and so forth. I guess we could put it into kind of a few different categories. One would be the oligarchs themselves, aside from Putin. There are oligarchs in Russia. There are oligarchs in Ukraine. And I understand that I'm reducing this to the extreme. But the oligarchs in Russia more or less don't accept that the oligarchs in Ukraine control Ukraine's resources. So there is an economic and material motivation here. And there are very specific oligarchs that control, like Akhmetov and Kolomoisky and Poroshenko and Firtash and some of these other Ukrainian oligarchs that control critical infrastructure, resources, everything from coal and gas to the pipelines that Russia needs to deliver gas to Europe and all kinds of different things. These oligarchs control them. This is part of the outcome of the post-Soviet kind of criminal strip-mining of the Soviet Union by the west that more or less allowed a very small number of business people to accumulate all of these resources. So just like in Russia, in Ukraine you have these oligarchs.

On the other side of the border, there are Russian oligarchs. Those oligarchs see these Ukrainian

oligarchs as a bunch of piss-ants that should be just pushed out of the way. So there is this element of it that they should seize that and they have ideological justifications for it. "Right. Well, this is actually Russia. Excuse me, Novorosia, new Russia under Catherine the Great, Imperial control and the resources, the land, the agricultural output, all of this. This actually belongs to Russia, for you see it as Russia that developed this land, Russia that colonized it" etc. And it's true. It was colonization; really not that significantly different from how colonization happened in the United States or what we call the United States today, the displacing of an Indigenous group in the case of Crimea, the Tatars. In the case of the rest of Ukraine, as sort of strange combination of German immigrants and people from various parts of the region that had been living in that area, ultimately colonized by Russian agricultural interests. And that's what makes Ukraine what Ukraine is today.

So it is a complicated country. The east is more Russian speaking, the west is more Ukrainian speaking. There's a whole history associated with the divisions here, including the fact that the west is not Eastern Orthodox Christian, but Roman Catholic. It is much more closely associated to Poland, Polish culture, et cetera. Ukrainian language is spoken much more in the west than it is in the far east. Anyway, I don't have time to go into all of the differences, but the point is that there are sort of practical material reasons. There are also ideological ones, as I just said, a kind of imperial revanchism. I don't know that Putin is necessarily purely driven by ideology, but people like Aleksandr Dugin are leading Russian fascists and fascist sort of thinkers who have sketched out what we call Eurasianism. They certainly think this way. So, yeah, I think that between the economic interests, the ideological pull of a sort of reconstituting of the Russian Empire, and ultimately for Putin, I think that he expected this to be striking a strategic blow against NATO and the United States, essentially establishing that Russia not only has red lines and that it will enforce those red lines militarily, but that Russia ain't scared of NATO, basically. I don't know. I mean, that's three of the reasons. I could probably list a dozen more, but we'll run out of time.

"Dugin is kind of a joke"

Derek Johnson: Yeah, I noticed that. I wanted to get your answer on this. When Putin had his rambling. I don't know, how long was that? What a 45 minutes, two hour casus bellis there on live Russian television arguing for why he was going to do what he did. All I could think of was, did Dugin write this?

Eric Draitser: I know. You know, it's funny. I did an interview with a Russian Marxist, a really popular blogger named Andrei Rudoy. Really interesting conversation. And one of the things that I asked about Dugin and ideology and these things, and he laughed. He said people on the Russian left are going to really get a kick out of the idea that people in the US and elsewhere are talking about Dugin because Dugin is really kind of a joke in Russia. He's like an Alex Jones type figure, you know what I mean? He's not somebody who people really take seriously. And I said that I can fully understand. But Dugin's propaganda and the propaganda that comes out of the Kremlin, that is associated with the sort of Fourth Political Theory, Eurasianist crap that Dugin peddles, that was never really directed at the Russian people, that was directed to the west. That was directed at a lot of people like us who would be absorbing these things from an anti-US perspective. So I think that we should be, on the one hand, careful not to read too much into the influence that Dugin has in the Kremlin. And at the same time, we should also be careful not to underestimate the power of some of those ideological arguments that he's been making. And like I said in my interview with Andrei, I was like, whether or not the Russian left or Russian people give a damn about Dugin, Dugin is taught in the military academies. Russian military officers know all about Foundations of Geopolitics, his book, et cetera. Anyway, I only say all of that because I'm sort of constantly trying to negotiate between reading into what Putin is saying and connecting it to Dugin, which it does. And there's many ways in which it does. But also trying to caution myself not to read too much into it, because I know just as well as a lot of other people know that Putin is not an ideologue. Putin doesn't have beliefs. He's a postmodern politician, very much like Obama and very much like Trump. He allows everyone to project onto him what they want. So that's why Putin, even in the middle of this disaster, is still able to garner a significant amount of support. A lot of people project their hopes onto Putin in Russia. A lot of people project their hopes onto Putin in much the same way that people did for Obama and for Trump irrespective. And remember, Trump was kicking his own constituents in the teeth over and over and over again and they were just slobbering over him, you know what I mean? So it's like, not that different with Putin, really.

Derek Johnson: Yeah, I tend to see politicians like that, he's a Putinist. Trump's a Trumpist in a sense. You know?

Eric Draitser: In a sense, yeah, in a sense. No, I agree. He doesn't have an ideology. His ideology, to the extent that you could call it an ideology, it's a combination of imperial revanchism and Soviet

revanchism mixed with anti-communism, which is a strange kind of mix. It's like a nostalgia for the Soviet Union minus the communism part.

Derek Johnson: Yeah.

Eric Draitser: In other words. It's a nostalgia for Soviet power, Soviet prestige, but none of the actual economic bases that made the Soviet Union powerful. Things like universal education and healthcare. I don't need to explain what the Soviet Union was like, but you know what I mean?

Derek Johnson: Well, hence the Nazbols [National Bolsheviks].

Eric Draitser: Right, exactly.

Derek Johnson: I noticed that once Crimea was done and the propaganda served its purpose, Dugin was pretty much kicked out of his positions in the university and everything and was back to normal and didn't have any special place in anything.

Eric Draitser: I don't know what to make of it, to be honest with you. Like I said, Russian comrades are saying Dugin is a joke and irrelevant. I get it. I'm not going to discount what they're saying. They're there. On the other hand, I don't know how much I trust the idea that Dugin is just completely irrelevant now and totally side-lined just because he's no longer at the university or whatever. There could be all kinds of reasons why that would have happened, including the fact that he was toxic because of the Novorossiia terrorist actions. You know what I mean? Like, maybe they wanted to distance themselves from an internationally wanted criminal, you know what I mean? But still kind of maintaining ties.

Anyway, I don't know that I want to devote 30 minutes to Dugin. I just want to say that I am constantly evaluating and reevaluating my own opinion about just how influential Dugin is. But from the Western perspective, his type of propaganda has been very influential because that is precisely the vehicle that was used to infiltrate anti-imperialism on the left.

Derek Johnson: That's what I find frightening.

Colonialism in Ukraine

Ani White: There's a kind of Federal Nationalism, in a sense, with Duginism, which was very specific, was very much targeted at fascists elsewhere, kind of saying, "you can have your regional power and we'll have our sort of regional power." That was part of the whole Fourth Positionism thing.

But anyway, you've kind of touched on this, but how much do you think the historical relationship between Russia and Ukraine factors into all of this?

Eric Draitser: I mean, a lot. It depends on what exactly we mean by historical relationship. In some ways, this is a coloniser or colonised relationship, or imperial colonial power and neo-colony or however you want to call it. I mean, that is how Lenin described it. Lenin had talked about this, and Ukraine was how do I want to put this? Ukraine was critical for the Russian Empire because of its raw materials, because of its fertile soils and a lot of different reasons. And so for that reason, the relationship between those countries has been basically one of Russian domination for several centuries. To the extent that there is a relationship, I guess we probably shouldn't even call that a relationship. It's an imperial power and it's a neo-colony. Now, there is a history, though, that is, of course, also relevant, because that history ties to a lot of the justifications that the Russians are attempting to use with regard to all of this.

Derek Johnson: Well, don't you think, a lot of the Russian speaking Ukrainians that live in the east are there because they were brought in by the Soviet Union to be miners, workers and stuff like that?

Eric Draitser: Yes, but they weren't brought in really by the Soviet Union. That was in the Russian Imperial days. The coal mines of the Donbass go back to the 19th... actually, they go back even further than that. But really in the 19th century. So it was Russian Empire. Now, in terms of around the revolution, like I said, Lenin described Ukraine as equivalent to Ireland to England, that it is not just exploited but super exploited; that its entire existence is to basically sustain the imperial power that controls it. Right? That's, I think, correct, because the way that we have to understand Ukraine's history is one of essentially multiple countries. The west of Ukraine, like I already said, is so vastly different and so when the Nazis invaded in 1941, there were very different reactions depending on what part of Ukraine you were talking about. The Nazis had a tremendous amount of sympathy in the west. Now, that led to the organization of Ukrainian nationalists upon Bandera and the Hitler collaborationists, who then allied with Hitler against the Soviets, who had in various ways been destroying them for a couple of decades at that point.

So what happens after that, of course, we know how World War II goes, and that element within Ukraine and actually within all of Eastern Europe, that fascist political element, which is very real and very strong, that was forcibly suppressed by the Soviet Union, of course, Gulags and all of it.

So with the end of the Soviet Union, this begins to re-emerge. We can see that in Hungary. We can see that in all of the countries of Eastern Europe that were behind the, quote, unquote "Iron Curtain", et cetera, that they all have very active far right parties, they all have a virulently, ultra nationalist right wing, and that it is rooted in anti-communism, and that is a legacy of the 20th century. So the history of Ukraine is one of sort of conflicting political orientations, conflicting nationalisms, conflicting alliances. And so when Putin talked about it in his speech, he said that Lenin basically laid a bomb under the Russian people. Right. Which, in other words, what he really means is that Ukraine should not exist. That's how he justifies what he's doing. Ukraine shouldn't exist because it's essentially a made up country made up by the Communists, by the Bolsheviks.

Now, obviously, there are other historical episodes that play into this. Everything from the Holodomor ten years earlier, or I guess eight years earlier, to the liquidation during the Russian Civil War, the liquidation of a number of different factions. We don't have time to get into all of that history. Suffice to say that Ukraine represents a huge historical wrong that needs to be righted from the perspective of Putin and the Russian imperial revanchists.

Derek Johnson: Yeah and that alone just sounds genocidal.

Ani White: Yeah. Well, it reminds me of the way people talk about Palestinians, that "these aren't really a people" kind of thing. But I dug up that quote. It was: "What Ireland was for England, Ukraine has become for Russia. Exploited in the extreme and getting nothing in return. Thus, the interests of the world proletariat in general and the Russian proletariat in particular require that the Ukraine regains its state and dependence, since only this will permit the development of the cultural level that the proletariat needs." Close quotes.

Eric Draitser: Thank you. And I just want to say, I bring up Lenin not because I want everybody to agree with Lenin on all things. I bring it up because Lenin was grappling with the issue of Ukraine and with the issue of the colonies of the Russian Empire, and he ultimately was in a position to make certain decisions about how these things would be addressed. So Lenin's understanding of the issue really frames, in a sort of counter-positional way, how Putin understands these issues. So Putin basically takes the 180 degree opposite approach, basically saying that not only do they not deserve self-determination – they don't really exist.

Ani White: Yeah and the fact that, as you said, Putin has very explicitly defined himself by opposition to that Bolshevik position. He basically argues that Ukraine only exists because of the Bolsheviks, in this almost conspiratorial way. But yeah, another line from Lenin was, he called Russia “the prison house of nations”. Which I think you could also very much apply to, say, the US or China, like these very much overextended kind of powers that then suppress all these sort of internal kind of contradictions. But anyway, as you say, it’s not so much that people have to agree with everything Lenin said and did. But that to understand Putin’s position, you partly need to understand what it’s opposed to, which is that position that does exist in Russian political history of Ukrainian self-determination.

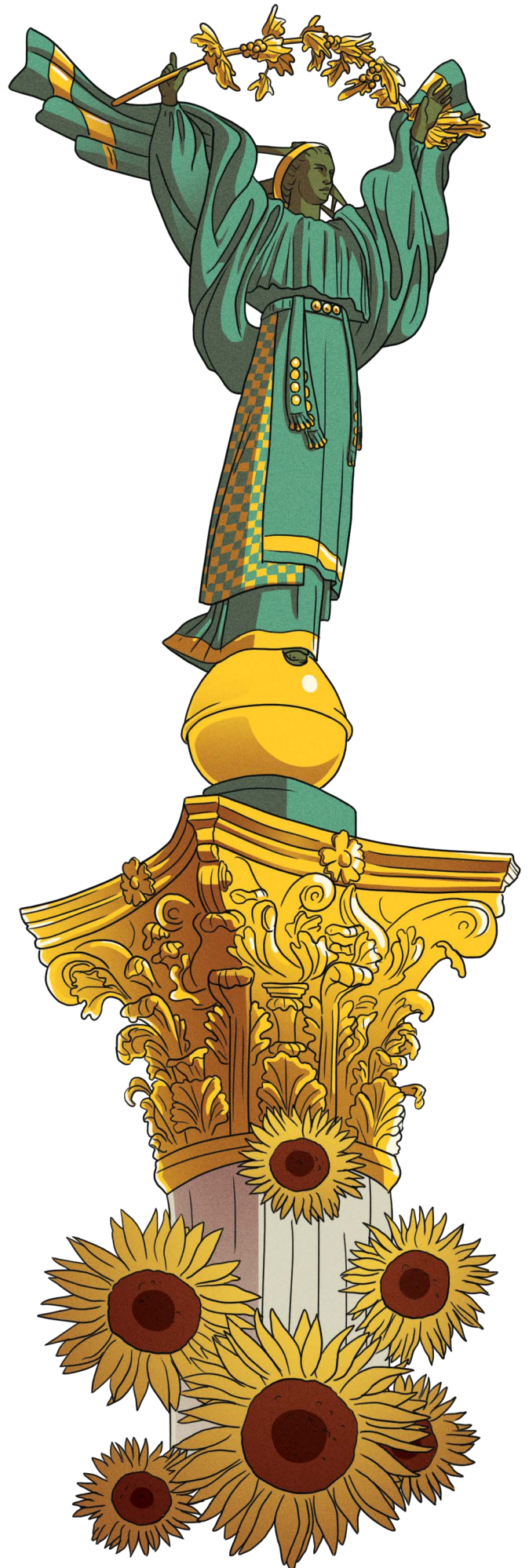
Blood libel

Eric Draitser: And I just want to say very quickly, there is an inherently fascist sort of anti-Semitic streak to all of this, too, because Bolshevism is in many ways a euphemism for Jewish conspiracy. Right? So that is something that has historically and today been promoted by the Russian Orthodox Church. There are things like blood libel, conspiracies about Jews sacrificing Christian babies and drinking their blood and all of those things. We could go all the way back to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which was created by the Okhrana, the Tsar’s secret police, for the purposes of fanning these flames of conspiratorial thinking. This led directly to pogroms. I have whole branches of my family tree that are empty because of pogroms, carried out in 1919, and carried out at other times in that period as well. So when Putin makes these kind of anti-communist, anti-Lenin ideas that “oh the Bolsheviks planted a bomb under Russia.” It’s another way of saying the Jews conspired against Russia.

Derek Johnson: Exactly.

Eric Draitser: Because the Jews are the Bolsheviks and the Bolsheviks are the Jews. And that is a fundamental principle of fascism, is to understand Bolshevism and Jewry as being inseparable.

Derek Johnson: Yeah, that’s something that I’ve seen in the propaganda that they pushed inward, that we haven’t. We’ve only heard so much that Maidan was a coup, like a colour revolution pushed by the CIA in America. There’s the Nazis in the Azov Brigade, and then other stuff. That fascists took over the parties, even though we know it’s like 2% now. A Jewish president. But when you look at the totality of some of the propaganda they’re pushing that we don’t hear in the west.



Some of it I saw was that they were saying how, and this is typical anti-cosmopolitan “the Jews” type of language and conspiracies, of this corrupt and cosmopolitan Ukrainian illegitimate elite ruling things under this new status quo is pushing homosexuality on Ukraine and stuff. And I was thinking. Yeah, you combine that with the Jewish president and the rest of this stuff.

Eric Draitser: Oh, not just the Jewish president, Derek – a coke sniffing, degenerate pervert Jewish President! Right? All of those things. One insult on top of the other. I don’t particularly have all that much positive feeling about Zelenskyy one way or another. Well, no, I should say I have positive feelings for him because his life is in danger. But I mean, to say, as far as what he comes from, the forces that backed him, how he rose to power, et cetera, it’s all very dirty. Ukrainian politics is extremely dirty. It is driven by oligarchs. None of the oligarchs are good guys, et cetera. But to your point, the way that Russian propaganda frames not only Zelenskyy but just the nature of the Ukrainian state is basically the idea that they have a Jewish puppet and a bunch of Nazis running the country. And in fact, that’s obviously not the case. Like I said, the far right is very real. Some Nazi elements are absolutely real. But you can’t then take it to the next step, which the Russian propaganda does, which is to say that they quite literally control the politics of the country, which is false. They have some degree of influence. Their influence is definitely larger than their electoral results would indicate, but they are not exactly like the kind of force that controls the streets of Kiev or anything like that. If you were to listen to Russian propaganda, you’d think that this was the Third Reich in Ukraine. You know what I mean? When in fact, it’s kind of just a normal country with a far right element.

Derek Johnson: Yeah and not only does it fall apart, but it bounces back because really the worldwide focus and the font of fascism right now is not Germany, but it’s Russia, and fascists look towards Russia. So to act like some other country is the Nazi is to completely ignore how modern Neo-Nazism is fixated in Russia and spread by Russia.

Eric Draitser: Yes, and I want to say not just Neo-Nazism, but all the various flavours of contemporary fascism, because, again, like somebody like Richard Spencer, who was a prominent fascist in the United States. I don’t know if he’s still prominent. He’s kind of disappeared a little bit. But Richard Spencer is an example. I mean, I know that he actually has an anti-Russia position now, but who knows how much of that is because of his ex-wife being Dugin’s protégé. But that’s their business. I think that you’re correct in the sense that they look to Russia for some

inspiration. But I think it’s even more material than that. Russia provides material support to the far right all over the world in a lot of different ways, and they have in many different ways. Now, I don’t want to go so far as to say that all elements of the far right globally are emanating from the Kremlin. It’s not quite so simple. I mean, each country does have its own political dynamics. Sometimes some of the things that the Russians push totally fail. Sometimes they don’t. But, you know, that Russian influence was used to help to push forward Brexit. Then the momentum of that helps to push forward Trump. Some of the same elements and players were involved, including Peter Thiel and Cambridge Analytica and Palantir and these corporations and the data-mining and the data-harvesting. All of this stuff that was done in the service of Brexit, in the service of Trump. This is all part of a global far right network. Bannon and the Chinese billionaire whose name I’m blanking out on at the moment – Guo [Wengui] and the others. I mean, they are part of what you could call a global fascist conspiracy. But maybe conspiracy makes people nervous. So we could just call it a global far right movement or the far right camp or the fascist camp or whatever. And Russia’s the heart of that. But there are also ideological reasons. And the Russians push these ideological reasons in various ways. One being that Russia is the defender of Christianity, of Christendom, of traditional values. Right? That they will as a country, by national pride or whatever, fight against equality for LGBT people or fighting against “the trans agenda” or race education or “critical race theory” or whatever. Right? A lot of the things that the far right in this country has pushed got their start in Russia. Russia already has a lot of the legislation that our Nazis would love to see put on the books – from banning books to criminalizing transgenderism to whatever. So anyway, yes, Russia is absolutely at the heart of the global far right.

Influence operations

Derek Johnson: Well, I would say it depends on the kind of far right, too. I mean, if you look at the 1990s, they were putting a lot of money into the religious right here. And maybe not all different conservative groups and stuff, but it took to later of moving through the religious right to getting through groups like The Family and...

Eric Draitser: Yeah but that was more in the 2000s.

Derek Johnson: ...and then the Russian Orthodox members or chapters of the Family basically run the thing now and through that they went through the NRA and then they got through into the GOP.

Eric Draitser: Yes but these are fairly standard influence operations. This is not anything earth shattering as far as the Soviets did stuff like that, too. There's all kinds of Cold War books about ways that they were doing influence operations. US was doing it. Soviets were doing it. Those type of things – yes, absolutely. I guess I'm more thinking about ways in which they created political outcomes that fundamentally altered the course of events. In other words, if the Russians hadn't provided the material support that they provided to help bring along Trump, well, then we definitely would never have had Bolsonaro either.

Derek Johnson: Exactly, right.

Eric Draitser: So some of the things that happened because Bannon was instrumental in bringing Bolsonaro to power. Bolsonaro comes to power through the use of WhatsApp disinformation propaganda that was basically perfected in the 2016 election in the United States. So these things are all kind of connected and I guess really all I was trying to say is that Russia is not orchestrating everything, but Russia helped put things in motion that have then sort of evolved from there.

Derek Johnson: Yeah and I understand they just throw shit at the wall and see what sticks.

Eric Draitser: Totally.

Derek Johnson: I had heard of campaigns that they did around the time of the Brexit stuff, that they were pushing antivaxxer and pro vaccine stuff on the internet just to see if they could stir controversies. They were taking both sides of the issues.

Eric Draitser: Yes, yes.

Derek Johnson: See what would work. And we saw how – and this is something stupid – but you can see even the connections, because of Bannon, of the cultural war issues of Gamergate and how then, because of Trump being in there, we get all these people like Spencer and Unite the Right rally and now January 6 and all this stuff, Trump trying to pull a self-coup to stay in power. But if you look at it, too, they even tried, just out of stupidity, of how asinine – they hacked Rotten Tomatoes and sent a whole bunch of bots at Star Wars VIII [The Last Jedi] just to see if they could, by causing controversies and cultural issues and subcultural issues, if that did anything.

Eric Draitser: Yeah. I mean, they were testing the waters...

Derek Johnson: And then they ended up doing that on Facebook.

Eric Draitser: Yeah. They were testing the waters, sort of testing out, gaming out scenarios, gaming out how easy or difficult it might be to move the global conversation or whatever.

Derek Johnson: Nudging theory.

Eric Draitser: Exactly. Now, I will say, just to be very clear about this, there's nothing – nothing – that the Russians have done that the United States hasn't done, right. So the United States engages in all of these same things. It's just that what we're talking about in terms of a global far right, that is very much Russia's project. The United States absolutely has supported the right and the far right in a number of different contexts, especially in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, using the ultra-nationalist elements and former Nazis and fascists to kind of undermine the Soviet Union, undermine communism, all of these things. The United States has done it. I'm not even talking about Latin America, where fascists carried out genocides thanks to the United States.

Derek Johnson: Or the World Anti-Communist League.

Eric Johnson: Yeah, so, we could point to a thousand examples of how the United States has done these things a hundred times over. So I don't mean to suggest that Russia is the sole source of evil in the world, but given that we're talking tonight about Ukraine, I think we could be forgiven for focusing on Russia's transgressions.

Competing empires

Ani White: You've described this as a situation of competing imperialisms. Can you go into that?

Eric Draitser: I think that that's correct. The first time I really heard that – I want to just give credit to Patrick Bond, who was on my show like six years ago probably, talking about that. About BRICS and that BRICS was no alternative to Western global hegemony, that BRICS was basically just a sub-imperialist construct. I didn't totally agree with him at that time. And here we are six years later, and I've come around to that because I think that's actually borne out by the facts.

Let me start off with the question and the answer, and then I will explain what I mean. The question, what comes after US global imperial hegemony? Or what comes after US global imperialism? More and deadlier imperialisms. That's the answer, unfortunately. It's like when we talk about capitalism. Well, what comes after capitalism? Well, it's not necessarily socialism, it could also be feudalism. You know what I mean? So anyway, the

point here is that the world that we understood; the unipolar world, to use Russia's terminology, where the United States dictates everything and the United States is the arbiter of all conflicts and the United States is the one that is meddling everywhere – this is now part of the past. Because 35 years or 31, 32 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has now re-established itself as a regional imperial power. The Chinese, without question, are establishing themselves as that, using different means, to be sure. But Chinese activity in Africa, the Belt and Road policies, the way in which they basically flex their financial muscle for the purposes of extending their soft power, et cetera. The Chinese absolutely are global in a sense, but they're still kind of a sub-imperial power. And similarly, Turkey. I think people probably may forget that Turkey has intervened and won three wars in the last three years. Turkey is the reason why Azerbaijan defeated Armenia in their recent war, which was the first truly drone war. Using Turkish drones, by the way. Turkey intervened in Libya. They are the reason that the so called Libyan National Army, led by General Haftar, was beaten back and why the government in Tripoli survived. It survived pretty much entirely because of Turkey's direct intervention. Turkey has also intervened, of course, in Syria. Turkey currently occupies part of Northern Syria. So Turkey is pursuing what Erdoğan has openly for 15 years called a neo-Ottoman foreign policy. What is neo-Ottoman but neo-imperialist? I mean, it literally is that. And so you see the vision of Turkish hegemony as stretching from Istanbul all the way east to the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, because the Uyghurs are a Turkic people. These are people whose language is of Turkic origin. They see themselves as Turkic people, not Chinese people. They are not Han Chinese, et cetera. And, of course, that includes all of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and all of these places. They are all, in various ways, Turkic peoples. And so, from Erdoğan's point of view, he's in competition with both China and Russia to re-establish the Ottoman sphere of influence. And that Ottoman-Russian conflict was probably one of the central conflicts of the later part of the 18th and early part of the 19th century. That is how Russia gained Crimea, ultimately. That is how Russia gained most of its influence around the Black Sea. That is how Russia pushed into the Caucasus. That's where Chechnya and Dagestan and Ingushetia and all of these places that are part of Russia, they all come from those wars.

Ani White: Yeah. And can you talk about how Turkey's role has played out with the current conflict?

Eric Draitser: Well, Turkey is very opportunistic. Erdoğan specifically is very opportunistic. And so as

this war was beginning to take shape, or rather, the build up to the war was beginning to take shape, Erdoğan quickly swooped in and signed a deal with Zelenskyy to build a massive drone facility outside of Kiev. Now, whether or not that is ever going to get off the ground now doesn't really matter. The point is he was sticking his thumb directly in Putin's eye right at the moment that Putin was saber rattling, preparing to go to war. So Erdoğan on a number of occasions has outmaneuvered Putin and Russia. Like I said, in Libya, Turkey ended up intervening and winning against Haftar, who was backed by the Russians. Similarly, in parts of East Africa where the Wagner mercenaries have been present, Turkey has also moved in quickly. Turkey is also pushing in the Black Sea for energy resources and other things, and, of course, in the Caspian region as well. So Turkish interests, both economic interests and political and strategic interests, seem to continuously run up against Putin's interests. And that's one of the really interesting dynamics here, because, of course, it should be always remembered that at the end of the day, Turkey is a member of NATO. So any conflict between Russia and Turkey is a Russia-NATO conflict, and Putin knows that. That's what Erdoğan is counting on.

“Disinformation is so thick”

Ani White: There's a lot of disinformation flying around in general. How do you think we can filter for that?

Eric Draitser: Boy, I wish I had a good answer for that. The disinformation is so thick on all sides, so many lies coming from everyone, really. The Russians – goes without saying – are pushing their propaganda and their disinformation through their various channels, even with RT and all the rest of them booted off of YouTube and booted off of cable TV. I mean, there's still ways of disseminating their propaganda and their disinformation. Similarly, the Ukrainians have gotten better at propaganda. They put out a lot of disinformation. I feel like every day is some new feel good story about a ghost pilot or a mother saving her children or whatever, and a lot of them have proven to be false. What does that mean? Not a lot. I mean, these are the things that happen in war. People exaggerate, people do what they do to convince other people to act or whatever it might be. So I don't necessarily worry so much about that disinformation. I think the more dangerous disinformation is really kind of about the nature of the conflict. One of the key elements of Russian disinformation is that, it's not even really disinformation, it's more just the Russian line here, is namely that Russia, by definition, has not been the aggressor, because it is NATO over the years that has been the aggressor. Like with all

good propaganda, there's so much truth to that. NATO is an absolutely belligerent force. NATO should have long been dismantled, just as George Keenan, the famous Cold War Hawk, said at the end of the Cold War that NATO should dissolve, that it was a dangerous force, a destabilizing force in Europe, and that eventually it would push the Russians into a confrontation. So the Russians are correct to point to NATO in that way. Now, I guess I shouldn't say the Russians so much as those who lick their boots. But I mean, of the various Putin boot-lickers and the way that they sort of speak about it, you would think that somehow the United States was provoking Russia endlessly on a daily basis and Putin had no choice. This is false. This is absolutely false, and it is deliberately trying to obscure the nature of the war. If you obscure the nature of the war and you cast a doubt on who is the aggressor, people aren't going to really have a very clear position. And that's the whole point. Russian propaganda and disinformation is meant to muddy the water, meant to make it difficult to understand what is going on. And the more difficult it is, the more difficult it is to have a really principled and staked out position.

So in any event, I think that the real dangerous disinformation comes from Russia when they push a lot of that. Also the major disinformation, maybe it's not even disinformation, just lack of information and stupidity comes from the liberals who are calling for a No Fly Zone. This is so extraordinarily dangerous, I almost shudder to even think about it. Right? They're calling for a No Fly Zone as if we're dealing with Libya or Serbia or Iraq. I mean, No Fly Zones have only been imposed in those three examples – Libya, Serbia and Iraq. And in none of those examples was the other country armed with a thousand nuclear warheads. So I think that people have to be a little bit smarter about how they use the language of resistance. It's perfectly righteous and legitimate for the Ukrainian people to resist a criminal invasion force like this. But when people in the west who are not even engaged in the fight start talking about sending NATO jets into the air to protect the skies over Kiev, I don't think they're really thinking through the implications. None of that is to say that just give Putin everything he wants, let him do whatever he wants. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is that people have an obligation to think very carefully about the consequences of every decision that gets made in a war. This is a war. Right? Wars – you can't undo things. If a NATO jet shoots down a Russian jet, you can't undo that. And it forces escalation. It forces responses. Right? It takes away options for de-escalation. It takes away options to get out of this conflict. It forces a response. That is the problem here is that, again, we're talking about a country that can respond. This is not Iraq in '98.

This is Russia. They have nuclear warheads that would hit Europe in a three minute window.

Derek Johnson: Yeah. What I'm afraid of with Putin is he's escalating no matter what. So, like, if we stopped our governments and we're able to protest against those kinds of actions that could accelerate and escalate things, even diplomacy or giving him what he wants is going to make him escalate and keep doing it.

Eric Draitser: It depends. I think it depends. I think it's going to be about practical considerations. There's no way the Russians can prosecute a full blown European theatre war. They can't. They don't have the money. They don't have the resources. They don't have the material. I mean, look at how badly they're getting beat up in various places in Ukraine. I'm not saying they're losing the war. I think that's nonsense. But they're definitely taking heavy losses. This is not a country that has unlimited resources. This is definitely, in my view at least, feel free to disagree with me, but in my view, Putin vastly underestimated what he was walking into in Ukraine. And so the idea that he's looking to expand and escalate, I mean, maybe if he feels like he has absolutely no way of backing out of this. Right? But I do believe that he will be looking for some way to basically declare a victory, have his mission accomplished moment like Bush did, and get the hell out of there if he can take away some pieces of what he wants. But he's not going to get away. He's not going to leave. He's not going to do any of those things if he doesn't get anything. You know what I mean? This is part of the paradox of what we're dealing with here. The paradox is you don't want to, quote-unquote, "reward his aggression", but if you don't let him get some elements of victory here, you're forcing escalation on his side.

Derek Johnson: The Pyrrhic, quote-unquote "victory", because he gets to rule over the dirt and all the dead bodies of Ukrainians.

Eric Draitser: And that is an interesting point you bring up, too, because let's say hypothetically, they carve up Ukraine and Russia takes what is now Donbas: the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, and they're incorporated into Russia. Then they have some kind of a treaty that establishes some sort of neutrality for the rest of the country, or however that might look. Right? What is Putin gain? Well, the oligarchs and Putin gain some resources, control over those resources that I talked about earlier. That's true. But they also then inherit a totally devastated country that they will then be financially responsible to rebuild. They inherit the debt. They inherit all of the other aspects of Ukraine itself. And on top of that, they have thrown away pretty much

all of the global goodwill that they had. They have burned bridges with many of the countries with which they had fairly decent relations. They really only maintain relations with a very small number of countries that are very dependent upon Russia for a variety of reasons. So ultimately, yeah, he'll walk away with some of the things that he wants. He has to, if any of us want to avoid a larger war here, Putin's going to have to get some of what he wants. And I think that it's fairly clear that the question of Crimea is settled. Crimea is Russia, and it's going to be Russia, and it's going to be internationally recognized as that. And if it's not, then this war will not end. The so called DPR and LPR, Donetsk and Luhansk, will probably end up being Russia as well, with some kind of demilitarization of Ukraine. If he could get those things, then he could turn around and claim victory and go home. Maybe we could avoid this spilling over into a broader war.

Putin overshooting?

Derek Johnson: But if he demilitarises Ukraine, doesn't he get to just invade them again when they can rebuild forces?

Eric Draitser: Potentially, potentially. But things are dynamic. It doesn't just happen. One doesn't necessarily lead to the other, because Putin's idea would be to get a more compliant Moscow-friendly government. But he's destroyed whatever goodwill he had in Ukraine. Forget it. Never going to happen now. Never going to happen.

Derek Johnson: It's destroyed a lot of infrastructure, too.

Eric Draitser: He's destroyed a lot of infrastructure. I was just thinking from the political perspective, but yes, obviously actual infrastructure, not just roads and pipelines and things, but literally the fields where the wheat is supposed to be growing. You're going to have military debris and chemical waste spills and all of the other things that happen in war. But I do think that ultimately, to your point, yes, even a demilitarized Ukraine would still raise some kind of question for Russia. But I think ultimately that's what Donetsk and Luhansk become. They become buffer states for Russia.

Derek Johnson: Yeah. It's like the cost-benefit analysis here is almost negligible, even for Russia, because it's like you said: yeah, the oligarchs get stuff, but it sure as hell is outweighed by all the cons.

Ani White: I feel like that's something empires have a long history of, is overshooting.

Eric Draitser: Yes.

Ani White: It's certainly overshooting. And getting into things that end up costing more than they profit is actually something empires have a long history of doing. On which note, do you think Putin has overplayed his hand here?

Eric Draitser: No question. No question. Biggest blunder, certainly of his career. Probably one of the biggest blunders, at least in my lifetime, that I could think of in terms of on a global scale. Yes, I think he misplaced it. I think he overshot it. I think he miscalculated on a number of fronts. I could speculate a number of different reasons why. I imagine one of the major reasons is that a lot of the more moderate, reasonable voices that used to be around Putin have been side-lined for various reasons. This is part of the reason why General Ivashov, who was a high ranking chief of staff of the Russian Federation's military at one point, he was one of the top officials in Russia. Several weeks before the invasion, he wrote an op-ed demanding Putin's resignation over his Ukraine policy and over what he was doing, saying that this was an insane policy that would lead Russia down the road of ruin. So there were voices that at one time had influence in the Kremlin that today don't. And so I think that Putin may have found himself in the trap, just like you were alluding to just a minute ago, that many empires and many kings have found themselves in the past where they're surrounded by yes men, surrounded by people who tell them that everything that they want to hear, rather than maybe the unvarnished truth about what they can't do versus what they can do. I think that he's a victim of that. I don't want to say he's a victim, but I mean to say that that was some of the process.

I also think that there might be an element of time in all of this. I think that Putin, he's not super young. Maybe he feels that his time is running out to really accomplish the big goals of his regime, which would be as I said, sort of reconstituting some of the Russian Imperial footprint or some of the Soviet footprint. So I think there's that element as well. And I think there's also a political calculation or miscalculation rather, regarding Biden and US politics and Trump and the timing of all of this. Putin has a lot of options even today. Putin could conceivably extend this war for another two years and wait and see what happens in our general election in the US. If he wanted to, he could just bleed Ukraine very slowly for the next two years, keep minimal forces there, keep wrecking the place, keep everything going, and then let Trump come back into power and see what he can do. So there are possibilities and there are options for Putin.

I think, though, that he may have misjudged not only how deep the fractures were in the European

Union, in the EU and US relationship post-Trump. I think he also may have overstated just how positive certain elements of the European and especially German business community were towards Russia and Russian gas. I think they may have overestimated how important that would be. So anyway, it's just a long way of me saying, yes, I think he miscalculated on a number of things.

But I also think that people in the west and elsewhere really should be very careful not to make the assumption that he has no options. I did a whole video last night or two nights ago or whatever about all of the economic weapons that Russia has. Russia's going to get blasted economically. They already are: their economy is being destroyed and everything is tanking. At the same time. Russia can absolutely harm the entire world economy by holding off on its chemical exports, fertilizer exports, precious metals exports, other things like that that it provides to the world that will have shocks around the world. Just wait six months from now when food prices are 30% higher and governments start collapsing because of it.

Ani White: The interconnected nature of the economy does mean this is a bit complicated for everyone.

Derek Johnson: Yeah. No country can be isolationist. They don't seem to be learning this lesson, whether it's here or Hungary or Russia, whoever, everybody seems to think in this world of post-globalization or globalization 2.0 or 3.0, that they somehow could be isolationists again, there could be economic isolationists still.

Eric Draitser: Yeah, the Russians are sort of being forced into being isolationist at this point. They don't have a choice.

Derek Johnson: Well, I think they chose to do it, though.

Eric Draitser: Well, no, they chose to invade Ukraine. But like I said, it's my personal opinion that they did not expect this level of economic war to be waged. I don't think they thought that there would be such unity between the US and Europe on these wide ranging sanctions. I definitely didn't. I definitely don't think that they thought that companies like BP and Shell and Mobil would just run out away from Russia. Which they have. I think that they miscalculated in terms of how deep the investments were and whether or not capital was going to be willing to walk away. And it has been, that's the part of this that I think has been somewhat shocking to me personally, and I think it definitely was shocking to the Kremlin. So while they do have options, they are also the ones taking the brunt of the pain. So, it's both.

Derek Johnson: Yeah. It seems like they overplayed

the thinking that, "okay, we got China, we got India. Boris Johnson and the Tories are on our side, with all the oligarchs living in England. And maybe these different people will help us with the sanctions or kind of stop some kind of international consensus." Yet it didn't work.

Eric Draitser: Yeah, I also think that Putin, read Biden and the Biden administration as weak and that they would not have a strong response to this or they would be caught on the back foot because of US domestic politics, because of the insanity of just the US political life these days. And in some ways, he was right in the sense that Biden hasn't militarily escalated. He hasn't confronted Putin. But where Putin was wrong was that, and I don't mean Biden himself, but the Biden administration, the people around him, that they wouldn't respond forcefully, and they have. And in fact, I would say that the Biden administration's response has been absolutely devastating to Russia. I think Biden is just loathsome in every way and the Biden administration, I have nothing positive to say about them, really. But I will say that in the course of the last two weeks, they have definitely shown themselves to be pretty adept at managing this situation, because every time they've been put on the spot, in my view, they've made the correct decision: no to the transfer of the jets. That was a correct decision. No to No Fly Zone. That is a correct decision. They are forcing Russia to be an aggressor and not giving Russia the pretext that the US is escalating. So the only people that believe the US is escalating are Russians, who feel the escalation literally in their pocketbooks. But for the rest of the world, they can see the US – they haven't sent in the military. They're not even really sending that much in the form of weapons. If anything, the British are sending more weapons in the US, at least it seems. Right?

So I would say that overall, the Biden administration seems to have played this pretty well. I think that they understand that Putin made a tremendous ghastly mistake, and they're going to try to slowly bleed him dry.

Derek Johnson: Well, do you think the part of why they do to act as well is because of a lot of leaks coming out of the agency of that guy he dressed down in that one meeting on television?

Eric Draitser: Could be. I mean, the FSB, which is the internal security service in Russia – there are leaks in the FSB. But I will tell you, I just read an absolutely insane article today, supposedly by an insider from the FSB on one of these blogs right now. It's insane. If you read it and you assume that it is true, it is deeply unsettling because it paints a picture of extreme, extreme aggression

in the Kremlin and preparations for an extreme response. So it's very terrifying, actually. But the reason I bring it up is only to say that I am personally sceptical of all of these alleged leaks because the Russians also know the various levels of psychological warfare and creating leaks and managing leaks and manufacturing leaks is also part of the game. I personally am a little bit sceptical. I'm not saying that they're not real. I'm just saying that I'm cautious about accepting those leaks as true only because I have absolutely no way of knowing. Just like with the CIA. It's not that different, right? In the United States, with the CIA, something comes out from the CIA. Well, okay. Was something just revealed, or did the CIA deliberately reveal something because they have an ulterior motive? You know what I mean? And we're constantly facing that question, and it's not really that different with FSB in Russia.

Derek Johnson: Yeah, sometimes I guess the spy agencies of our different countries seem to do that because they figure "it's getting out anyway. So let's get ahead of it."

Eric Draitser: Get ahead of it, frame it in a way that works for our benefit. Yeah, absolutely. Exactly. So it could be any number of things. And that's true of a lot of stuff in this conflict. It's like there's a wide range of possibilities. One of the things I mentioned in one of my videos this week was how it's extremely disorienting for a lot of people. You know what I mean? It's like you try to follow what's going on in Ukraine and you don't know what the hell to believe. You go to one Telegram channel and the Russians are about to conquer Kiev. You go to a different channel and it's like the Russians are being beaten back to Moscow, you know what I mean? And it's like, well, which one is it?

Sci-fi news

Derek Johnson: And the news in Russia is sci-fi.

Eric Draitser: Oh, I know. It's totally insane.

Ani Johnson: There's a lot of triumphalism, oddly, on the Ukrainian side. Maybe not oddly, but there's a very strong sort of triumphalist narrative on the Ukraine side, which I think in terms of the quagmire of it, an important phrase I heard was "the Ukrainians don't have to win, they just have to not lose."

Eric Draitser: Yes.

Ani White: And so this for Russia could be a very protracted thing, much like, again, many entanglements that Russia and the US and other countries have had in the past.

Eric Draitser: Yeah, exactly.

Derek Johnson: Afghanistan.

Eric Draitser: Well how did the Taliban win a 20 year war? By not being destroyed.

Ani White: Yeah.

Eric Draitser: Their very existence is a win it means they won. And it's just to your point.

Ani White: And how do you respond to the claims that Russia is denazifying Ukraine or, more importantly, how do you characterise the role of Nazis in this whole dynamic, I guess, because obviously we disagree with that claim.

Eric Draitser: Yeah, well this is one of the real complicated issues of the narrative here because like I've said before, all good propaganda is rooted in some degree of truth. Right? And the more truth there is, the more believable the propaganda becomes. And there's a tremendous amount of truth in the Russian propaganda about Nazis in Ukraine. Obviously Azov Battalion, but it goes beyond that. There are political parties, there are networks, patronage networks, there are criminal gangs, there are street thug gangs, there are gangs in suits. There are all kinds of different elements of the far right that exist in Ukraine, some of which have wormed their way into positions of political power, including very high levels. Dmytro Yarosh, who was the founder of Right Sector, which is a Nazi outfit there was chief adviser, one of the advisers to the army chief of staff, Arsen Avakov was the interior minister, et cetera. You could point to several examples of this. But the point is...

Derek Johnson: It sounds like a description of most countries, including our own.

Eric Draitser: Yes, exactly. Well, that's what I was about to get to is that if you go in other countries, even in Eastern Europe, places like Hungary and even in Germany and elsewhere, fascists make up a pretty significant chunk of the political life. I mean, in Germany they're one of the biggest political parties, the Alternative für Deutschland, which is a fascist political party. Similarly in Sweden with Sweden Democrats, in Hungary, obviously with Orbán and the Jobbik and all the various far right elements there. And you could point to a number of examples. So in that sense, Ukraine is not particularly unique.

Where it is a little bit unique is in the paramilitary component: that there are sort of fascist paramilitaries that operate there. But again, this is part of the effectiveness of the propaganda because while that is true, the Russian propaganda

doesn't tell you that the primary forces that they were fighting against were Russian fascists in Donbas. Various Russian supported Nazi groups and skinheads and other types that had been recruited by Russia, including their mercenaries from Wagner, which itself was founded by a Nazi. So actually, what we're really talking about in Ukraine is essentially a form of projection by the Russians. Russia has without a doubt the largest concentration of fascists in the world. The fascists of Europe don't compare to Russia in that regard. And so it should be said that Jason Stanley, who is professor of philosophy at Yale, he wrote the bestselling book, *How Fascism Works*. He was on my show this week talking about one of the critical elements of fascism is projection, basically accusing the other side of doing all the things that you do. Right? And that that is one of these sort of hallmarks of fascist political power. And that that is ultimately what Russia is doing. Yes, there are Nazis in Ukraine. Yes, there is a terrible historic legacy of that. Just to be very clear, both two of my great grandfathers were murdered by Nazis and Nazi collaborators in Minsk and in Odessa, respectively. My great aunt and her entire family were murdered by Nazis in the Odessa ghetto. So this part of the world and that element, that part of history is as close to my heart and my family as anything could be. So I am particularly sensitive to Nazi collaboration, the history of Nazi collaboration in Ukraine, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, the glorification of Stepan Bandera, all of these things that the Russian propaganda points to constantly are absolutely a concern. However, the idea that that is a primary concern when a literal military is bombing your country, this is where the upside down logic of the Putin apologists and boot lickers comes in. Right? Where they will focus on photographs with Nazi emblems on Ukrainian soldiers and not pay attention to the family of twelve that just got blown to smithereens by Putin's bombs. You know what I mean?

Derek Johnson: Yeah, they seem to have no comments on the hospital full of babies and everything in Mariupol.

Eric Draitser: There's no reason to comment on it. It's not defensible, it's indefensible. That's why they're not really defending – I don't see very many people outright defending Russia. I mean, some of them do, but most of them kind of sort of go through this mental gymnastics of. "Well, yeah, no, of course, what Russia is doing is not great. But it was NATO and the US that did this really."

Derek Johnson: Yeah, they act like Russia is being unfairly isolated or targeted here and censored.

Eric Draitser: Yeah, exactly. But apply that to the United States in any context. Right, because that is how that is somewhat how the Bush administration pushed the Iraq war. That if we don't act, the smoking gun will be a mushroom cloud, as they used to say. Right? That we have to act. We are being forced by the other side to act and if we don't, there will be major, deadly consequences for the entire world. Hitler said the same about Sudetenland and Poland. So it's kind of a standard operating procedure.

Strengthening NATO

Ani White: An example I point to is the US during the Cold War and the Vietnam invasion. and the way they justified that through Domino Theory. Which I think is very similar to the logic of, "well, NATO forced Russia to do this." It's essentially saying that this country is entitled to invade other countries because there's another imperial block or there's a rival imperial block kind of thing. And as you've alluded to, Russia has done things like this in the region long before NATO ever existed. Imperialism doesn't need another imperialism to sort of force it into existence.

Eric Draitser: That's right. And I will just say, the point I wanted to make is one that I'm going to record a whole video on it at some point in the next day or two. I think we need to be pretty sober in our analysis of what the outcomes are here. Obviously, the war is still very, very young and so many things can happen and everything is dynamic. But just taking a look at it so far, realistically looking at it in total, Putin's move into Ukraine has probably been the thing that has strengthened imperialism more than anything in my lifetime maybe. I can't remember a time when NATO was seen as more important, more significant, more unified. I don't remember a time when Europe and the United States were as unified as they were now in response to Russia. So by doing this, he's galvanized all the forces that he claimed were already arrayed against him. It's, what's the phrase? Cutting your nose to spite your face, right? That Putin, by virtue of allegedly acting in an anti-imperialist way, has, in effect, strengthened imperialism.

Ani White: He's given legitimacy [to it].

Eric Draitser: Of course!

Derek Johnson: Well, his justification didn't make any sense, because his whole justification is that NATO is moving its borders too close to him. So his answer is to seize another country.

Eric Draitser: Right. I mean, look, from the great powers' perspective of imperial history or whatever, it does make sense. If you want to

think of the world as in a Napoleonic kind of way, you know what I mean? Buffer States and all of that. Everybody knows history and how these things have gone, but we don't live in the world of Frederick the Great and Napoleon or whatever, you know what I mean? Those are not the right people to have picked because they're from two totally different time periods. But anyway.

Derek Johnson: Well, these fuckers think they're playing Risk, though.

Eric Draitser: Yeah, that's what I'm saying, is that, yes, if you think about it in those terms, then what he's doing makes sense. But that's not what we do. You know what I mean? We don't think that way. Shit, Lenin didn't think that way. Anarchists in the early 20th century didn't think in those terms. The Left doesn't think that way. That's not what we do. That's not what we are. We think about working people, international solidarity, opposing imperialism in all of its forms, opposing capitalism. These are the things that we are supposed to unite around. It's not unite around a right wing authoritarian, because sometimes he acts against the Empire that we live in. Putin is absolutely one of the enemies.

Derek Johnson: He's the richest man in the world, right?

Eric Draitser: *laughs* Who knows? Who knows, right. But he's definitely, definitely a form of oligarch himself. We need to be clear eyed about these things and I'm sorry to those people who see the world in terms of anything that opposes the United States is inherently anti-imperialist. I'm sorry to tell them that reality has come crashing down on that fantasy. That fantasy is dead. The truth is that we are now in an era where there is a neoliberal imperial camp and a far right fascist Imperial camp. And I personally ain't picking any of those sides.

Derek Johnson: So what is to be done?

Eric Draitser: Yeah, what is to be done, to quote [Lenin], well several famous Russians. Honestly, I know it's not sexy or whatever, but we have to have a negotiated settlement. There's no other way to end this. This has to end. We have a responsibility to our children to stop a nuclear war. You know what I mean? To stop the potential for a nuclear war. My kids are five and two. They have their entire lives ahead of them. I cannot even fathom the world walking into a global catastrophe. And that, unfortunately, is absolutely within the realm of possibility and absolutely on the table.

If you read the literature of the summer of 1914, you begin to understand just how Europe basically blundered its way into World War. A World War that really none of them wanted, but because of the nature of the politics and because of the interplay of the actions and the decisions that were made, it ultimately created a world war, even though realistically, no one wanted one. Unfortunately, I fear that that is a very real possibility for us here, that I don't think that Putin is angling to have nuclear holocaust and the end of all things. I don't think that the United States wants that either. But sometimes things can spin out of control if you're not careful. And this is one of those times where events could spiral very, very quickly and it's extremely, extremely urgent that we find a solution. So for my mind, the obvious solution is that you have to first establish some kind of a temporary ceasefire that then becomes a permanent ceasefire leading towards some kind of a treaty or a settlement. If not, I really worry that things become too big and the genie is out of the bottle. I think we should probably focus on what it is that we want, which is peace, here. I'm not a big fan of Zelenskyy or of the Ukrainian state or of the gangsters that run it, or those who steal the mineral wealth of the country and leave it impoverished with a lower GDP than it had at the end of the Soviet Union. Ukraine has a lot of problems, but shit, I don't want to see it destroyed and wiped off the map. You know what I mean? This needs to end. I mean, we're supposed to be anti-war here, and we need to end this war, and we need to end it immediately.

Ani White: Thanks for coming on.

Eric Draitser: Thank you so much for having me.

Ani White: Yeah, and thanks, everyone, for listening. In place of our usual request for Patreon contributions, we suggest donating to the Ukrainian horizontal volunteer group, Operation Solidarity, at Operation-Solidarity.org. Goodnight, and good luck.



Migrant women and family violence

By BRONWEN BEECHEY. Content warning: Suicide, violence against women.

Note: The case studies in this article are based on the experiences of several women who I supported in my role as a social worker. Names and identifying details have been changed.

Tina Sharma arrived in Christchurch in June 2017 to join her husband. By September, she was dead. According to Coroner Alexandra Cunninghame's report, released in April, Sharma took her own life because she was in a violent relationship. Evidence was given to the inquest that her husband, Narinder Singh, was controlling and abusive.

Sharma and Singh married in India in January 2017. Following her move to Christchurch, according to the coroner:

There is no evidence that she ever left the flat by herself to exercise, explore her new city, or shop. She did not have her own EFTPOS card or New Zealand bank account, and she could not drive.

The inquest heard that Singh discouraged Sharma from talking to her brother, who also lived in Christchurch, or her best friend. There was also evidence that Singh physically abused his wife.

According to Sharma's relatives, she would not have known that there were organisations that support women experiencing domestic violence that she could have approached.¹⁴

While intimate partner violence is a widespread problem in Aotearoa New Zealand – we have the highest rate in the OECD – women from migrant communities are particularly vulnerable. Approximately half of the homicides in Aotearoa New Zealand are family violence-related, and a large proportion of these are migrant women. As well as language barriers and cultural beliefs

that normalise IPV, many migrant women struggle with complex, bureaucratic and inflexible immigration and social welfare systems.¹⁵

Migrant victims of IPV can apply for the Family Violence Temporary Work Visa and Family Violence Residence visa if they were in a relationship with a New Zealand citizen or permanent residence. The latest figures show that 1,614 of these visas were granted between 2010 and 2021. The five main source countries have been consistent during this period: India, China, the Philippines, Fiji and Tonga. As the first three countries are major sources of immigrants to Aotearoa New Zealand, this partly accounts for their predominance in these statistics; but all of these countries have high rates of IPV (as does Aotearoa NZ). The number of FV visas granted in that 10-year period is low compared to the levels of family violence in Aotearoa New Zealand, and it has been noted that women from Middle Eastern, Latin American and African backgrounds make up only 11 per cent of applications.¹⁶

For many migrant women, their immigration status is tied to that of their husband or partner. Usually, the male partner is the principal applicant for a temporary or resident visa or sponsor for his wife's application. This means that he can delay her visa process and/or refuse to sponsor her partner resident visa, leaving her on a temporary visa, restricting her access to employment, education, welfare and health services. The threat of withdrawing sponsorship or removal from a joint application for residency is often enough to stop victims of IPV from seeking help. An Australian study in 2017 of family violence

14 Gates, Charlie. Woman takes her own life after being in abusive relationship, coroner says. Stuff, 14 April 2022. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/128358803/woman-takes-her-own-life-after-being-in-abusive-relationship-coroner-says>

15 Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Recent migrant victims of family violence project 2019: Final report. Wellington, NZ, 2019. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/12138-recent-migrant-victims-of-family-violence-project-2019-final-report>

16 Ayallo, Irene. "Intersections of immigration law and family violence: Exploring barriers for ethnic migrant and refugee background women." *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work* [Online], 33.4 (2021): 55–64. Web. 19 Apr. 2022. <https://anzswjournal.nz/anzsw/article/view/913>

against women on temporary visas found that many women had not been directly involved in obtaining their own visas, and the majority did not know their migration status or visa type¹⁷.

The Australian study reported that out of the 300 cases that they examined, 20 involved forced domestic labour, where women are sponsored to migrate (usually after an arranged marriage) and then forced to maintain the household for the immediate or extended family of their partner. In some cases, the woman's passport and documents were confiscated, her movement restricted, and the perpetrators told her that they were a "slave" or "owned" by the family¹⁸. A 2016 study conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand among Indian women survivors of domestic violence also found that this occurred frequently¹⁹.

"Ayesha" is one Indian woman who experienced this form of abuse. Ayesha was from a relatively well-off family and had a university degree. She had married an Indian-born New Zealand resident who lived with his family. Ayesha was expected to do all the housework and cooking, including heavy lifting that caused her to have a miscarriage. She was physically and emotionally abused by her husband and also her mother-in-law. After becoming pregnant again, Ayesha fled the home and went to the police station. Fortunately, she was taken to a refuge, where she stayed until she gave birth to her child. Ayesha was eventually offered accommodation by a member of her church.

Because she had married a NZ resident, Ayesha was able to apply for a Family Violence residence visa and temporary work visa. However, she had no income during the 3 months it took to grant the visa, other than child support and her Best Start payment. Work and Income will pay a special benefit, Emergency Maintenance Allowance, once the temporary FV visa is granted, but not before because the Social Security Act specifies that only NZ citizens and permanent residents are entitled to any Work and Income benefit.

The process for granting a FV temporary work visa or residence visa is complicated and confusing, particularly for those who do not have English as their first language. The application is usually

lodged by an immigration lawyer, not many of whom will agree to work pro bono. The applicant needs to show documents such as police reports, protection orders, criminal convictions for family violence or a statutory declaration stating that the violence has occurred plus two supporting statutory declarations from professionals. If applying for the FV residency visa, the applicant also needs to satisfy the health and character requirements for residence, and give reasons why they would be unable to return to their home country (such as having no way to support themselves financially) or facing abuse or social exclusion due to stigma associated with reporting family violence, being separated or divorced, or a sole parent).²⁰

Ayesha was supported with food parcels, clothing and baby gear by the refuge and social workers, as well as advocacy with Work and Income and Immigration NZ. She was able to get her learner's permit and once her temporary visa was granted, moved into a flat with her child who was also enrolled in daycare. Because she was an educated, articulate woman with good English, Ayesha was in a better position than others to find support and advocate for herself, but she still found the process stressful and frustrating.

For "Mele", the process was even harder. Mele came to New Zealand from Tonga on a visitor visa. She then met her partner and they eventually married. He was also Tongan but had permanent residence. Mele believed that once they married, she was covered by his residency. Her husband was abusive, and the abuse worsened after Mele gave birth to their child. After a violent assault by her partner, Mele called the police who removed her partner from their home and served him with a police safety order. He was charged over the assault and Mele was given the number of a women's refuge outreach service.

Because Mele was not legally in New Zealand, she was not able to apply for the FV temporary visa immediately. Instead, she had to apply for a visa under Section 61 of the Immigration Act as a "special case" to allow her to stay in the country.²¹ As part of that process, she had to apply for a police report from Tonga to prove that she had no convictions there. After receiving the report back from Tonga, the report was sent to Immigration NZ. After several

17 Segrave, Marie, *Temporary migration and family violence: an analysis of victimisation, vulnerability and support*, Monash University, Melbourne, 2017. <https://www.monash.edu/arts/gender-and-family-violence/research-and-projects/completed-projects/temporary-migration-and-family-violence>

18 Ibid.

19 Somasekhar, Sripriya, "What will people think?": Indian women and domestic violence in Aotearoa / New Zealand, A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Waikato, New Zealand, 2016. <https://research-commons.waikato.ac.nz/handle/10289/10592>

20 Community Law Manual. Immigration: Family Violence, vulnerable migrants and other special visa policies. <https://communitylaw.org.nz/community-law-manual/chapter-29-immigration/family-violence-vulnerable-migrants-and-other-special-visa-policies/>

21 Ibid.

weeks passed with no response, contact was made with INZ who said they were still waiting for the police report. It turned out that the report had been received and scanned, but not attached to Mele's file. The Section 61 visa was granted, but Mele was not eligible for the Emergency Maintenance Allowance until she was granted the Family Violence temporary visa. (She also had to request another police report from Tonga, despite the fact that the information had not changed since the first one). Mele survived on her Best Start payment (which she was entitled to due to her ex-partner's residency) and food parcels.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 made the situation for Mele even worse. Immigration NZ, like other government departments, closed its offices and sent its workers home. However, apparently, INZ staff were unable to access their work files for some time, so Mele's case, along with everyone else's, simply came to a halt. Phone calls and emails went unanswered. Mele was not in a position to return to Tonga even if she wanted to, due to border closures, but Work and Income still refused to grant any payment. Mele felt hopeless and depressed, even considering giving her child to her ex-husband to care for as she worried that stress and lack of money were affecting her ability to care for the child.

At this point, social workers supporting Mele took the issue to her local MP's office, and a couple of weeks after that, Mele's Temporary FV visa was granted. She was finally granted an Emergency Maintenance Allowance which was back-paid to when she had applied for the visa. Mele is still waiting for a decision on her residency visa, and her economic situation is still precarious as most of her benefit goes on rent.

Both Ayesha and Mele are educated women who speak English well. They had good support from community agencies and, unlike many other survivors of family violence, did not have serious harassment or pressure from ex-partners or family to return to their abuser. Yet they still struggled with a complicated, inefficient and inflexible response from government agencies that were supposed to help them. For many other migrant women, the struggle is too much and they go back to the violent relationship.

If Mele and Ayesha's partners had not been permanent residents, neither would have even been able to apply for the FV visa. The only recourse for those women is to apply to the Immigration Protection Tribunal on the basis of "exceptional

circumstances of an humanitarian nature."²² This is a long and expensive process. Women in this position will often stay in the relationship until their partner has residency, but sometimes the abuser will remain on a temporary visa so that they are able to keep their victim dependent on them. This is particularly the case when the abuser is on a long-term temporary visa with high-paid employment, such as a Talent Work Visa, as they are eligible for publicly funded healthcare and have no need for any other benefit of permanent residence.²³

Aotearoa New Zealand is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In 2018, CEDAW's monitoring committee raised concerns about Aotearoa New Zealand's treatment of recent migrant victims of family violence, including:

- The situation of migrant women with children who do not hold permanent visas and lose their partner's sponsorship through separation or divorce; and in some cases, women have been deported to their countries of origin, leaving their children with the abusive partner
- That women may stay in violent relationships so as not to lose their visa status
- Migrant women face obstacles in seeking justice due to knowledge and language barriers, as well as a lack of legal aid

The committee recommended that Aotearoa New Zealand's immigration laws be changed to allow access to permanent residency for mothers of children who hold Aotearoa New Zealand nationality. It also recommended that shelters and free legal, counselling and support services be provided for migrant women victims of family violence; and that information on family violence and how to respond to it are available in community languages²⁴.

However, even these modest recommendations have been ignored. There need to be major changes to the Immigration and Social Security legislation so that migrant women can leave violent relationships, access benefits and "fast-track" residence visas. Successive governments have treated migrants as a source of cheap labour, causing many to live in poverty and substandard housing, which increases the possibility of family and intimate partner violence. While this continues, more women will die.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Recent migrant victims of family violence project 2019: Final report. Wellington, NZ, 2019. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/12138-recent-migrant-victims-of-family-violence-project-2019-final-report>

²⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of New Zealand. 2018. https://women.govt.nz/sites/public_files/CEDAW_C_NZL_CO_8_31061_E%20%283%29.pdf

About Fightback (Aotearoa/Australasia)

Fightback is a trans-Tasman socialist media project with a magazine, a website, and other platforms. We believe that a structural analysis is vital in the task of winning a world of equality and plenty for all. Capitalism, our current socio-economic system, is not only exploiting people and planet – but is designed to operate this way. Therefore, we advocate a total break with the current system to be replaced by one designed and run collectively based on principles of freedom, mutual aid, and social need.

Fightback is a trans-Tasman organization, operating in Aotearoa and Australia. In the modern era of free movement across the Tasman, 'Australasia' is becoming a reality in a way it has not been since the 19th century. So many New Zealanders (tauwi as well as tangata whenua) now live and work in Australia – and decisions made in one country increasingly impact the other, as the inter-governmental controversy surrounding the Manus Island detention camp shows.

We wish to engage socialists from both sides of the Tasman – in particular, socialists from Aotearoa living and working in Australia – to continue the lines of analysis and directions of organization which we have been pursuing. Beyond the dogmas of 'sect Marxism'; beyond national boundaries; towards a genuinely decolonised, democratic, feminist and queer-friendly anti-capitalism.

We recognise that capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa and Australia through colonisation. While we draw substantially on European whakapapa and intellectual traditions, we seek to break the unity of the European colonial project, in favour of collective self-determination and partnership between tangata whenua and tauwi. We recognise that this must be a learning process.

While we draw inspiration and lessons from history, theoretical agreement on past revolutions is not the basis for our unity. Rather, we unify around a common programme for transformation here and now.

Fightback's Points of Unity

Economic & Social Justice. White supremacist, capitalist patriarchy exploits the working majority. We support all movements for redistribution, recognition and representation (as put by socialist feminist Nancy Fraser), from the workplace to the wider community. The average union member in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia is a woman, so the struggle for economic democracy must be intersectional: sacrificing no liberation struggle for the sake of another.

Transnational Solidarity. Struggles in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia are interconnected with transnational struggles: to give just one example, refugee rights here are connected with the wars that force people to seek asylum. We stand against racist nationalism and imperialism, and for self-determination everywhere. This transnational solidarity crosses all geopolitical 'camps': neither Washington nor Beijing truly supports self-determination.

Radical Democracy. Socialism suffocates without democracy, as the catastrophic failures of the 20th century demonstrate. Radical democracy cannot be purely majoritarian (as this may curtail the rights of minorities), and cannot be guaranteed by states: to quote slavery abolitionist Frederick Douglass, power concedes nothing without a demand. Radical democracy is defined by the ongoing fight for self-determination in all sectors of life. We also stand for democracy within the movements, including the need for principled debate.

Popular Science. In an era marked by populist fake news from left to right, we seek to 'intellectually vaccinate' the movements against conspiracy theories and pseudo-science. As German socialists Ferdinand Lassalle and Rosa Luxemburg asserted, we must bring workers and science together, rather than locking knowledge away in paywalled journals. Although scientific research doesn't exist outside social context, and isn't the only form of knowledge, it's a necessary check on our assumptions.

Ecosocialism. Extractive capital is driving mass extinction. We support investment in sustainable infrastructure: high quality public housing, public transport, and green cities. Landlords,

extractive industries, agribusiness and other beneficiaries of the status quo are preventing such sustainable solutions, so power must be taken out of their hands and given to communities.

Anti-fascism. Fascism and similar movements claim to be anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist, but instead redirect working people's anger against scapegoat groups or fictitious conspiracies. We fight all tendencies on the Left and Right which scapegoat and demonise the victims of capitalism and imperialism – including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, transphobia, and the smearing of people fighting oppression as "terrorists". Only solidarity of all oppressed and exploited communities can solve the social problems we face.

Constitutional Transformation. Capitalism was established in Australasia through colonisation, and sovereignty was never ceded. As a tau iwi (non-indigenous) based group in Aotearoa/New Zealand and so-called Australia, we support the fight for indigenous-led constitutional transformation. Although we don't yet know exactly what constitutional transformation will look like, it must involve both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, actively engaged in building institutions based on mutual recognition.

Also available from

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